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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BEHAVIOUR, ACTION AND EDUCATION:
A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Behaviour, Action and Education" submitted by George L. C. Hills in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy of Education.

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Date 18th June, 1976

DEDICATION

To my parents, who taught the value of education.

ABSTRACT

This is a study that traverses the boundaries of three main branches of philosophical inquiry: The Philosophy of Action; The Philosophy of Mind and The Philosophy of Education. It represents an attempt to understand what might be called "The Problem of Action" and to demonstrate its significance for the theory and practice of education. As such, it has two main purposes. The first, is to examine sympathetically, yet critically, a number of recent attempts by philosophers to explain the difference between human actions (the things persons do) and mere bodily movements or physiological occurrences (the things that happen to them), i.e., to come to grips with the problem of action. In conducting this investigation, particular attention was paid to the work of three contemporary philosophers who have achieved considerable prominence in the newly emerging realm of Action Theory or The Philosophy of Action; namely, A.I. Melden, H.L.A. Hart, and Richard Taylor. The views of these writers are outlined and discussed in some detail, and in doing so the attempt is made to critically evaluate their respective theories of action. The second purpose of this study is to show that the Philosophy of Action, or philosophical inquiry into human action, can contribute a great deal to and stands to gain a great deal from attempts to come to terms with some of the more persistent problems that confront educational theory and practice. In this connection, special attention is paid not only to certain fundamental problems of concern to educational theory and research but also to some of the more pressing practical problems that come up in connection with educational policy making, evaluation and testing, counselling, teacher evaluation and the day-to-day activities of practicing teacher.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF ACTION

Few if any of our concepts are more familiar to us than are those of behaviour and action. We use them in a wide variety of contexts to do a great many different and important jobs. Yet, despite their familiarity, despite their significance in our thought and our communication about a broad spectrum of human affairs, a little reflection shows them to be very slippery and surprisingly difficult to pin down. Of course, this state of affairs, far from being unusual, is typical of most philosophical problems. Often, in stepping back from the commonplace and familiar and subjecting it to careful and critical scrutiny, one finds that notions which, in the normal course of events, tend to be regarded as straight-forward and unproblematic turn out, on closer inspection, to be illusive and deeply perplexing. In some cases, however, it is unnecessary to go to any great lengths in order to appreciate that all is not so clear-cut and unproblematic as would first appear. In the case of 'behaviour' and 'action', for example, various surface signs betray the presence of deeper difficulties. Among the more obvious of these symptoms are the vagueness and ambiguity that typically accompanies the use of these terms in ordinary discourse. In short, familiar though they may well be, 'behaviour' and 'action' are often employed in such a way that their meaning is far from clear.

But, you may very well wonder, why should the confusion and lack of clarity apparent on the surface, and the underlying difficulties it reflects, be of even the slightest interest to anyone, save perhaps the pedantic? Why, you may ask, should we pay any more attention to the muddles and perplexities surrounding the use of 'action' and 'behaviour' than to those attending the use of 'fire', 'foot', 'friend', 'fruit', or of legions of other concepts, which play important roles in our day to day commerce with other persons? Now, of course, the point raised by these questions is well taken. They remind us that such issues can be seen as "genuine" problems only in certain contexts, or only in the light of certain purposes, and that in order to recognize them as problems of a certain sort more needs to be said about this context or these aims and purposes. Bearing these considerations in mind, I would reply to these questions by pointing out that, in the context of any serious attempt to develop more adequate ways of understanding human beings as persons, the vagueness and ambiguity normally associated with 'behaviour' and 'action' looms as a formidable, indeed I should say 'insuperable', obstacle to our efforts to realize this kind of understanding.

Let me briefly explain why this is so. To begin with, human beings can be understood both as material, or physical, objects and as persons. When they as conceived as material objects, human beings can be thought of as being of a certain height, as having a certain mass or weight, as having a particular colouration, and so on. These properties, and others, are qualities they share with other physical objects. On the other hand, what is distinctive of human beings regarded as

persons is the fact that they are conscious beings. And, as conscious beings they can be said to have a mind, or to possess mental qualities. In other words, physical objects including sticks and stones -- unlike creatures with minds — cannot form or possess concepts, are incapable of believing, knowing or thinking, lack the capacity for having desires and emotions, are incapable of experiencing pleasure or pain, and cannot enter into social relationships with others, etc. Now, it is a matter of very considerable concern to me, and to a good man other persons besides, that, although we have, during the past few decades, taken at least modest strides in the direction of increasing our knowledge of human beings *qua* physical objects, the same cannot be said of our endeavours to expand our understanding of human beings *qua* persons. In point of fact, the sad truth of the matter is that our accomplishments in this latter domain come off as very meagre by contrast!

Why is this so? How is this worrisome disparity to be accounted for? An important, indeed a fundamental, part of any such explanation must be tied up with the ways in which we seek to understand those qualities distinctive of human beings as persons. But, consider for a moment; how do we strive to gain access to what persons think, feel or desire, to what is "on their mind" or to what they "have in mind", or, indeed, to what sorts of person they are? Here, I think the natural and correct reply is that we learn about these things primarily *through what they do;* that is to say, *through their actions* and *their behaviour*. In short, an understanding of action and behaviour are absolutely essential to understanding human beings as persons both in general, and in particular instances. Or to put the point somewhat differently, behaviour and action are the master keys we use in trying

to unlock the door (or doors) leading to the mental life of human beings. Consequently, if our keys are poorly conceived and crudely fashioned we can expect to meet with sizable difficulties in trying to gain access to what lies beyond the threshold. But if we can begin to refashion our keys or replace them with better ones then our prospects of opening the door will surely improve. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that in many respects our present grasp of the notions of action and behaviour resembles a very primitive key. The conceptual confusion that currently surrounds these terms serves only to obscure and impede, rather than clarify and enhance, our thinking and communication in this domain. Nevertheless, if we can remove some of this confusion and achieve a better understanding of action and behaviour, it is very likely that we can improve our knowledge and understanding of human beings as persons.

This explains why 'action' and 'behaviour' are of particular concern to me and why, too, I am persuaded that we can further our understanding of persons by holding these notions up for systematic philosophical scrutiny.

Philosophy or philosophical thinking can help in refashioning the key. For it is an activity expressly concerned with improving our understanding of issues of this sort through the analysis, clarification and critical examination of our fundamental ways of thinking about them. That is to say, when philosophy is conceived of not as a distinctive body of knowledge but, instead, as an activity or form of inquiry -- viz., *doing* philosophy — it can be characterized by its special concern with analyzing and clarifying key concepts, with

unearthing and examining unrecognized assumptions, and with explicating and evaluating various types of judgements together with the grounds on which they rest. Thus, it is against this background and with a view to sharpening our grasp of the important but troublesome notions of 'action' and 'behaviour' that I want to try to discover how they are related, and whether, and on what basis, we might begin to distinguish between them. To this end I plan to concentrate, pretty much exclusively, on the work recently done by philosophers in the field variously described as "action theory", "the philosophy of action" or "the theory of human action". My purpose is to examine sympathetically, yet critically, their views on a number of important issues having to do with human action to see whether they may be of assistance in our attempts at coming to grips with the concepts of action and behaviour.

Clarity on this subject is, as I have already intimated, not a luxury we can do without. Nor is it problem of interest only to philosophers. Rather it is a matter of fundamental importance to the activities of persons engaged in a wide variety of pursuits, both theoretical and practical. Obviously, 'behaviour' and 'action' are concepts which figure prominently in the work of those who, like anthropologists, historians, linguists, philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists, as well as persons having a scholarly interest in economics, politics and the law, are in different ways striving to achieve a better theoretical understanding of human behaviour. And, as a philosopher of education, they concern me because of the central role they play not only in certain newly emerging but also in a number

of more long-standing topics of debate in the realms of educational theory and research. Furthermore, I am convinced that a richer appreciation of the way in which 'behaviour' and 'action' function in the context of various practical activities cannot but be of considerable benefit to those having other than "purely theoretical" reasons for wanting to understand the things persons do — particularly, those whose responsibilities lie within the field of education.

Education is the enterprise with which I am most familiar. And in this realm the notions of action and behaviour are employed extensively by researchers occupied with matters of such vital and continuing interest as the study of teaching and learning. They figure prominently in the shaping of educational policy. They play an important part in moral as well as in other forms of values education. And, more recently, they have began to play increasingly visible roles in such activities as; testing and evaluation, counselling, the evaluation of teachers and their teaching, and in a host of related areas. Furthermore, owing to the prominence they have achieved in these other spheres of endeavour, these concepts now enjoy a high profile in the activities of those whose task it is to prepare prospective teachers to assume their duties on the firing line, in schools and other educational settings. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 'behaviour' and 'action' are concepts that can come to play very important parts in the work of practicing teachers; especially, those seeking to better their understanding of their dealings with those they are striving to educate. In the concluding chapter of this essay I will outline some of the reasons why an

appreciation of "the problem of action", as I shall call it, might stand to benefit people with such diverse committments to matters educational.

At this point, I want to lay some of the groundwork for what is to follow in the chapters to come. To begin with, I will introduce the problem of action by showing how it arises in ordinary language. Next, I want to indicate five main areas within philosophy itself where the topic of action is a matter of special concern. After having described, in quite general terms, the range of questions that have tended to occupy philosophers in the sphere of action, I shall try to explain somewhat more precisely the kinds of questions I propose to address in this inquiry. And, finally, to conclude this phase of the discussion, I will attempt to provide a brief, introductory sketch of my explorations of the concepts of 'behaviour' and 'action' in Chapters II to VI.

How, then, has the "problem of action" come to be a problem in ordinary language? It stems partly from the fact that ordinary literate (English) speech recognizes a variety of interrelated senses of the terms 'behaviour' and 'action' (as well as 'act'). A brief look into the Concise Oxford Dictionary reveals something of this variety. When they are used as nouns we find:

'act' – 1. thing done, deed ...;
2. process of doing, operation;
3. decree passed by a legislative body;
4. main division of a play; etc.

'action' – 1. exertion of energy or influence;
2. thing done, act;
3. (in drama) a series of events represented;
4. mode of acting, management of a body;
5. legal process;
6. engagement between troops.

'behaviour' - 1. deportment, manners;
2. moral conduct;
3. treatment shown to or towards others;
4. way in which a ship, machine or substance works; etc.

By contrast, when these terms are used as verbs we discover the following entries:

'act' - 1. carry out ...;
2. personate (character in a play or in life);
3. perform actions, behave;
4. perform special functions; etc.

'behave' - 1. conduct oneself, act, conduct oneself with propriety;
2. show good manners;
3. work ..., having good, bad manners or conduct.

And, obviously, this list is far from exhaustive of the uses to which these terms are put in ordinary conversation.

In this study, my primary concern with 'act' or 'action', and with 'behave' and 'behaviour', has to do with the sense in which these terms are employed to signify or connote; as nouns, *things done, deeds* or *the process of doing;* and, as verbs, *the doing* or *performing of actions*. More particularly, I shall restrict my attention to those circumstances in which they are used to refer to *the things persons do* or *to the things done by human beings*. The matter of whether God (or Satan), animals, plants or even forces or machines, *do things* in this sense (as interesting as each of these questions might very well be) are issues I do not plan to address in this inquiry. And, finally, I shall further limit my examination of these terms to their use in situations in which they are applied to *human beings as individuals*, rather than as aggregates, collectivites or groups. In other words, for

the purposes of the present discussion, I shall ignore the role they play in such contexts as 'The behaviour of the crowd suddenly became more unruly' or 'The subcommittee acted on behalf of the parent committee', and so on. In short, I am interested in the concepts of action and behaviour only as they are used in talking about human beings one at a time, as it were.

So far then, especially in the light of the strictures I have already imposed (somewhat arbitrarily, perhaps), it might have begun to look as if there really is no such thing as "the problem of action" to which I have been alluding. After all, *O.E.D.* does suggest that 'action' and 'behaviour' are very nearly synonymous. Both seem to signify, in at least one of their standard senses, the doing of something or the performing of an action. So, what could possibly be the problem?

In order to bring the issue into sharper focus, more needs to be said about the concept of behaviour. Admittedly, according to past usage, there seems to be no real cause for concern. However, of late and owing to the ever increasing influence of a doctrine, or, better, a whole series of doctrines, loosely described as "behaviourism", these waters have been muddied considerably; especially, though by no means exclusively, in the provinces of psychology and education. The upshot of these developments is that 'behaviour', as it has come to be used, is sometimes employed to pick out not only actions, activities and performances, but also such things as reflexes, emotional reactions, cognitive and perceptual processes, various sorts of subcutaneous goings on, as well as things like dreaming and hysteria.
Clearly, then, current usage, particularly in North America, has gone a

good way towards sundering the formerly intimate connection between 'act' and 'action', on the one hand, and 'behaviour', on the other.

Therefore, in very general terms, the problem with which I am concerned may be stated as follows: Is everything that currently falls under the rubric of behaviour (including: bodily movements like eye-blinks, knee-jerks and nervous twitches; physiological processes like digestion, perspiration or respiration; and other goings on such as coughing, dreaming, and hallucinating) properly classifiable as *something a person may be said to do* or *an action they may be said to perform?* Or, are there, by contrast, certain kinds of happenings taking place in the human organism (say, the actions persons perform) which, because they happen to be unique in some fundamental respect, it would be misleading, or possibly even wrong, to include under this new and inflated concept of behaviour -- thereby, treating them as being on a par with some of these other events or processes? Let me now approach the problem from a slightly different angle by putting it in more concrete terms. This may help to further clarify the issue. Suppose that, while riding as passengers in an automobile, we happen to notice the driver's right leg moving in a certain way. We can imagine at least four, somewhat different, circumstances in which such a movement might occur. Would there be any difference in the way we would be prepared to classify and attempt to account for what takes place if we had reason to believe that the movement occurred either; (1) as a reflex (he bumped his knee on the steering column), or (2) intentionally (he was just learning to drive), or (3) out of habit (he was a very experienced driver), or (4) while the driver was asleep

(maybe he is so familiar with the route he thinks he can "drive it in his sleep")? Notice, now, that in each of these situations we could be dealing with a movement that is photographically identical with the movements taking place in each of the others. And it is against such a background that I am interested in discovering whether incidents such as these are sufficiently alike to justify our placing them under the same undifferentiated concept of behaviour, or whether, instead, they are sufficiently distinctive that we are warranted in classifying at least some of them as movements of fundamentally different kinds. In other words, are all of these movements to be regarded as items of the driver's behaviour, i.e. as *things he does?* Or must we attempt to mark off those of his movements which represent actions he performs from those which are not behaviours of this type?

Surely, there do seem to be some rather marked differences between physiological happenings like the circulation of the blood, or movements like knee-jerks, on the one hand, and matters of human action, on the other. But perhaps these differences are merely superficial. At any rate, this, in rather broad terms, provides some idea of how it is that the problem of action has come to be a "problem" in our ordinary discourse about human affairs.

Human action has, for a variety of reasons, long been a subject of concern to philosophers. Aristotle, for example, in his *Ethica Nicomachea* is interested in the concept because he believes that it is only for their actions (rather than for their eye-blinks and sneezes) that persons can be held morally responsible and, thus, be regarded as being deserving of praise or blame, punishment or reward. Later on,

others, including Thomas Reid and John Stuart Mill also addressed themselves to questions having to do with the nature of human action. And, more recently, various philosophers have dealt with the subject, most notably in the context of the longstanding dispute on the topic of Free Will *vs.* Determinism. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that, with few exceptions, philosophers have tended to take the concept of action pretty much for granted. And, when they have shown some interest in it, this interest has almost invariably been of an instrumental kind. That is, the study of action has typically been seen primarily as a means of gaining insight into some other and, apparently, more pressing philosophical problem, for instance, freedom of the will, or the grounds for moral responsibility, and so on. Of late, however, all of this has changed rather dramatically. During the past twenty years or so there has been an enormous upsurge of interest among philosophers in the topic of human action. Much of this rekindled interest can, I believe, be traced to the increased popularity of the social sciences (particularly psychology) during this century and to the influence of Wittgenstein who put the problem in very specific terms when he urged us to consider the difference between my raising my arm and my arms rising. Are we to say that both are on a par when considered as things one does, as mere movements, as reflexes or as physiological happenings? Or must we distinguish sharply between them?

Much of this recent flurry of philosophical activity in the realm of action theory has tended to be centered around five distinct, though intimately related, sorts of problems or questions. To begin with there are questions concerning the nature of human action. These are

conceptual questions, such as 'What is a human action', 'What can persons do?'. Or, to phrase them a bit more explicitly, 'What does it mean to say that a person performed an action?' and 'What does it mean to say that a person can perform an action?'. Another variation on the first of these is the question I have raised; namely, 'What, if anything, is distinctive of those forms of human behaviour that are actions?'.

Issues or problems of the second kind derive from the philosophy of science and have mainly to do with the nature of explanation. 'How are human actions to be explained?', 'Can we invoke the conceptual framework and methodological principles of physics or, perhaps, biology in order to account for human actions?', 'Or, by contrast, must we rely on the concepts of intention, motive or reasons and so on, which seem totally alien to the physical sciences, in order to give an adequate account of the things persons do?', and so on, are some of the fundamental problems that arise in this sphere. Furthermore, we can also inquire into whether the notions of goal-directedness or purposiveness -- concepts which can apparently be used to explain the behaviour of many living systems -- can, likewise, be employed to say why human beings behave as they do.

The third category of issues or problems are those of a metaphysical variety. This category includes the question of whether human agents are the same sort of thing as physical objects. There are ontological questions about whether there are such things as events or actions at all. And, there is the problem of whether human actions can be caused. If the answer to the latter is affirmative, we

face the further problem of determining whether agents or events are causes of actions. Normally, if one takes the position that actions can be caused by events then this is thought to lead very directly to the Free-Will Problem. If, on the other hand, the person or agent, who is a thing, as distinct from an event, does the causing, the problem of Free-Will is thought to disappear.

Fourth, there are epistemological problems. 'Can we be said to know that we perform actions?' is one important question concerning our knowledge of actions. A second question, which follows very directly from a positive answer to the first, is 'Is it by observation or inference that we know of our actions?'. And, by the same token we can inquire, in relation to our experience of other persons, 'How do we know, if at all, that others perform actions?'. There is yet another, very important, set of questions falling under this rather broad heading, on which little, if any, work has been done to date -- possibly because the problems they raise cannot be resolved through philosophical inquiry alone. Instead, it may be necessary to engage in other forms of inquiry, or to appeal to some of the findings of the various social sciences as well, in order to come to grips with them. Some of the questions belonging to this hybrid species might be; 'What must a person know in order to perform an action?', 'Are there important differences in the kinds of knowledge involved in performing actions of various types?', 'Would it be plausible, or even possible, to distinguish between actions according to their simplicity or complexity by appeal to the kinds (or perhaps "levels") of knowledge involved in performing them?', 'Are the ways in which people learn to perform

actions pretty much the same irrespective of what they are learning to do, or do they differ markedly depending, among other things, upon the kinds of knowledge that may be required in order to perform an action of a certain sort?'. Now, as I have already suggested, the latter series of problems represents a significant departure from the more traditional sorts of questions typically addressed by philosophers interested in the relationship between knowledge or knowing, on the one hand, and action, on the other. Indeed, it seems likely that any serious attempt to answer them will involve cutting across the boundaries of a number of disciplines, including philosophy, psychology and sociology. Moreover, it seems plausible to suggest that a collaborative approach to these problems, drawing upon the expertise resident in a variety of relevant disciplines, offers far more promise of yielding significant insights not only into these but also into a very broad range of problems concerning human behaviour than do the insular and fragmented approaches that currently typify the activities of those in these disciplines.[1]

And, finally, the fifth category of questions has to do with problems both of an ethical and of a meta-ethical kind. Questions included under this heading might be, 'Is it an action or its

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[1]One recent and notable exception to this tendency is reflected in the preliminary work of a small group of philosophers and psychologists who are tentatively exploring regions of overlap between the two disciplines in connection with such topics as; human action, cognitive development and interpersonal understanding. Cf. T. Mischel (ed.), Human Action: Conceptual and Empirical Issues (New York: Academic Press, 1969); T. Mischel (ed.), Cognitive Development and Epistemology (New York: Academic Press, 1971); and T. Mischel (ed.), Understanding Other Persons (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

consequences that we deem to be good or bad?', 'What does it mean to say that a person is responsible for his actions (or for the consequences of his actions)?', and, 'Under what circumstances are we justified in holding persons responsible for what have done and in judging them to be deserving of praise or blame, reward or punishment?', and so on.

This very brief sketch provides no more than a very general overview of the main varieties of problem that have tended to concern philosophers working in the field of action theory. Clearly, the conceptual questions concerning the nature of human action are the most basic or fundamental kinds of questions within this domain. By this I mean simply that unless and until we are clear about what an action is, we shall be unable to do anything approaching an adequate job of answering such other questions as: 'Can human actions be explained within the conceptual scheme of Physics?', 'Are actions caused by events or by persons', 'How, if at all, do we know that other people perform actions?', and 'Is it our actions or their consequences that are good or bad?'. In other words, the sorts of answers we give to explanatory, metaphysical, epistemological, together with ethical and meta-ethical questions about action all hinge, in the final analysis, on the logically prior questions concerning the concept of human action.

By now it will be evident that the problem I propose to address in this inquiry is conceptual. That is, in asking 'What is an action?', 'What is the nature of human action?', or 'What does it mean to say of someone that they have performed an action?', I am interested

in becoming clearer about what we mean, or what it is possible for us to mean, by the term 'action'. I am concerned not simply with what people ordinarily mean when they talk about action or make use of various action concepts -- though, I think there is much we can learn by attending to the way in which these concepts function in our everyday commerce with other persons -- but also with what it is possible for us to mean within the context of some more systematic attempt at understanding the things persons do. Of late, there has been a tendency among certain groups of philosophers to suppose that ordinary usage represents the last court of appeal when it comes to dealing with problems of this kind. And to some extent this is understandable given the assumption that has long been popular in certain other quarters, for example among tough-minded behaviourists, that the only proper (viz., "scientific") way to talk about human behaviour is in terms belonging to the language of stimuli and responses - a language bearing no discernible relationship to the experiences of those whose behaviour it is invoked to explain. Unfortunately, both of these views are reactionary. And both are extreme. Yet, each embodies something of value. Consequently, I think it important that we at least remain open to the possibility of developing an account of action that, at once, reflects both the concern for clarity and coherence inherent in the behaviourists yearning for scientific respectability, and the concern for the way in which persons ordinarily see themselves which prompts the ordinary language philosopher to invoke everyday usage as the ultimate court of appeal. In other words, in suggesting that I also have an interest in what it is possible for us to mean by human

action and a variety of related concepts, I want simply to leave open the possibility that, through this sort of inquiry, we might well begin to gain the sort of insight that will allow us to satisfy both of these concerns, while at the same time, enabling us to avoid the limitations associated with a blanket endorsement of one position or the other. It is this type of perspective that I plan to adopt in discussing the theories of action to be considered in the chapters that follow.

Let me now fill in some of the background that appears common to the theories I have chosen to examine. This will help to provide a framework within which we shall be able to draw some useful comparisons between important features of these views, and it will also afford some insight into why certain philosophers have elected to tackle the problem in the way they have. And, in addition, it should assist in further clarifying the nature of the problem itself.

To begin with, it will have been noted that in discussing the problem of action I have phrased it in two somewhat different ways. On the one hand, I have asked 'What does it mean to say of someone that they have performed an action?', and, on the other, 'What, if any, is the difference between an action and other forms of human behaviour?'. As the discussion unfolds, it will become increasingly clear that the positions we will be examining can be seen as attempts to answer one or the other, and in some cases both, of these questions. Indeed, the two versions are very nearly equivalent, in the sense that each is posed with the same end in view; namely, that of sharpening our grasp of the concept of action. Nevertheless, of the two, the second is the more instructive, because it alerts us to the kinds of presuppositions

that typically inform and direct inquiries of this kind. And by securing some insight into certain of these presuppositions, we gain access to a common, though tacit, framework within which a good many writers on the topic of action, including those to be considered here, seem to be working.

What then are some of the primary assumptions that normally underpin these accounts? Perhaps, the best way to bring them to the surface is by reconstructing the kind of reasoning that would lead to someones posing the problem in this form — viz., 'What is the difference between an action and other forms of human behaviour?'. In the first place, it is taken for granted that there is indeed something special or peculiar about the things persons do. Secondly, it is assumed that the way to bring out their uniqueness is by setting human actions in contrast to other things. And, here an important question arises; with what sorts of "things" can we most informatively contrast actions? In reply to this question, it is quite natural to suppose that the items best suited for this task are those having the most in common with the things people do. Interestingly, however, while a good many philosophers appear to adopt this *modus operandi*, they differ considerably among one another as to the items they are inclined to regard as being most closely akin to actions. Some seem to favour physiological processes like the beating of one's heart; others, muscular reflexes like the rising of one's arm; others, perceptual processes including seeing and hearing; others have sought to contrast action with thought; and still others have set action in contrast to certain lapses from social convention, such as a married

mans making a pass at a choir boy or a tutors crawling around the room sniffing while listening to an undergraduate essay. Now, at first glance, it is hard to see what members of this variegated collection of happenings might have in common with one another, to say nothing of their affinities with actions. This seems to present something of a problem. For this state of affairs could easily be seen as eroding any basis whatever for drawing illuminating comparisons between particular items in the collection (e.g. muscular reflexes and perceptual processes), or between theories seeking to single out and distinguish action from certain other members of this group. In other words, perhaps these happenings differ so radically among one another as to resist any attempt whatever at comparison. Must we, therefore, surrender, from the very outset, all hope of achieving these goals? Or can this problem be overcome? Everything here depends on what one is interested in learning from such an inquiry and on whether we can find a suitable basis for making these comparisons. On the first count, since I am interested in acquiring some insight into what it is possible for us to mean, as well as what we actually do mean, by these concepts (as well as how they might be related) I see this kind of undertaking as vital. But is it possible to bring it off? Is there available to us some basis on which we might begin to make the relevant comparisons, and thereby to solve this part of the problem? Here again I think the reply must be in the affirmative. Indeed, I suggest that it is ordinary usage that provides this type of project with its foothold.

Contemporary usage, it will be recalled, has come to treat 'behaviour' in a very open-handed way. Nowadays it is used in various

contexts to refer not only to actions, activities and performances but also to memory, perceptual processes, reflexes, physiological happenings, emotional reactions, dreaming and hysteria. Consequently, it seems plausible to propose that we might well begin to get clearer about the concept of action by contrasting actions with any, or perhaps all, of the happenings that currently fall under the rubric of behaviour. And, of course, by taking this tack we put ourselves in a position to explore the full range of contrasts philosophers have seen fit to draw between actions and these other sorts of happening, and to do so against a common background.

Let me try to explicate and refine the contemporary notion of behaviour in such a way as to further clarify the problem of action and thus establish a useful point of departure for considering, first in summary and later in more detail, a number of theories that philosophers have proposed in trying to come to grips with it. What, then, do all of the items currently catalogued under the heading of behaviour have in common? As an opening gambit, it might be suggested that all of them represent changes or processes involving human beings. Now if we understand 'behaviour' in this way, the problem of action becomes one of trying to determine whether there are any differences of a fundamental kind between those changes involving human beings that are their doings, or actions, and those changes that are not. But clearly this will not do. For I think it will be conceded that the concept of a change or process involving a human being is far from a model of clarity. It is far too broad. Would we, for example, be prepared to countenance such happenings as an erruption on the surface of a distant

star or the rotation of the earth -- changes that might well involve a great many human beings, or only one -- as items of human behaviour? I think not. One way of getting around this difficulty would be to suggest that what is common to those changes or processes we want to call behaviour is that they take place, or go on, *in* human beings or *in* the human organism. Indeed, we might carry matters a step further and propose that all human behaviour involves physiological processes. When 'behaviour' is interpreted in this way, the problem of action amounts to attempting to ascertain whether there is anything distinctive about the physiological processes associated with human actions. In other words, the task is to discover whether the physiological changes or processes involved in actions differ in any fundamental respect from those involved in other forms of human behaviour. Against this background, I now turn to the task of summarizing my explorations in Chapters II - VI.

In this study I have chosen to focus my attention primarily on the work of three prominent and influential writers in the field of human action; namely, A.I. Melden, Richard Taylor and H.L.A. Hart. I have done this for a number of reasons. First, because the views they offer up for consideration have at one time or another attracted a sizable following within philosophy. In the second place, each of these writers approaches the problem of action from a different perspective and, in consequence, has come to very different conclusions about the nature human action. And thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, is the fact that, although the views they propound and some of the arguments they advance in defense of these views may not be

entirely of their own creation (of course, much of what they do have to say in this connection *is* original), their work in this field — especially, the thorough and painstaking manner in which they have sought to elaborate and clarify their respective positions, combined with the clarity and vigour with which they have developed and extended the arguments used to support them — has significantly enhanced our understanding and appreciation of the importance of this problem area.

In Chapter II, I introduce the subject by considering the work of A.I. Melden. His views, as I remarked earlier, have exerted a considerable influence in the domain of action theory. Now because, in developing his account of action, Melden addresses most of the major issues in this domain, and also because his own argument proceeds through a number of stages, my examination of his position will be the focus of the next three chapters. In Chapter II, my main purpose is to scrutinize the first phase of Melden's account where he explores the similarities and differences between simple actions, ordinary bodily movements and matters of physiological happening, and considers various ways in which we might distinguish between them. Now, although it is a matter of some difficulty to get clear about what he is claiming in this context, one plausible way of reading him is as suggesting that there are two varieties of physiological happening; namely, simple actions, on the one hand, and "mere" or "pure bodily movements", on the other. When I perform a simple action, such as raising my arm, this involves a bodily movement consisting of a variety of electro-chemical, muscular and other physiological processes. And when my arm rises similar sorts of physiological processes occur. Nevertheless, Melden

maintains that my raising my arm is a simple action; whereas, the rising of my arm is a "mere" bodily movement. In short, he seems to be saying that there is an important difference between actions (or simple actions) and "mere" bodily movements or physiological happenings. At one point, Melden has put the matter in this way, "When I perform an action, there is some bodily movement that occurs, but not every bodily movement counts as an action — ...".[2] From what he says here, it is quite clear that he is raising the problem of action. On his analysis, the problem, which involves marking off bodily movements that are, from bodily movements that are not, actions, stems from the fact that there is a logical gulf between the language we use in speaking about human actions and the language we employ in talking about mere bodily movements — a gulf Melden regards as precisely parallel the gap in moral philosophy between 'Is' and 'Ought'. In other words, just as in moral philosophy we treat talk about what is the case as logically independent from talk about what ought to be the case, so, too, in the theory of action we must distinguish sharply between the scheme of concepts we employ in talking about bodily movements and the one we use in talking about actions. Accordingly, Melden thinks that any attempt to bridge this gap involves some sort of mistake -- a "category mistake" (to borrow Ryle's terminology) or one of confounding fundamentally different logical types. He then wields this distinction in criticizing theories of the sort espoused not only by most behaviourists but also by certain Neo-Cartesian

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[2]A.I. Melden, 'Action,' in D.F. Gustafson (ed.), Essays in Philosophical Psychology (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 58.

philosophers (in particular, advocates of one version of the theory of volitions) who have argued that the supposed gap can be bridged, albeit in somewhat different ways.

It must be admitted that Melden does make out a fairly strong *prime facie* case for holding that my raising my arm differs radically from my arms rising; after all, we do seem to describe them differently. Nevertheless, in concluding the discussion of this aspect of his account, I point out that a number of crucial doubts still linger. The first has to do with the fact that, although he draws attention to what appears to be a genuine distinction between mere bodily movements (or physiological happenings) and human actions,[3] he has done little either to explicate its basis or to explain why there should be one. Indeed, talk about a gap of this kind *ipso facto* rules out the possibility of any such accounting. That is, to maintain, as Melden does, that actions and bodily movements are separated by a logical gulf of this sort is tantamount to saying that there just is a difference — and that is all there is to it! In short, the distinction is assigned the status of a brute fact. The second main difficulty in this phase of

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[3] I now have grave reservations about the tentability of this particular line of argument. To begin with, it is not at all clear whether the gap in question is one between actions and bodily movements or, by contrast, between the types of language we employ in describing or referring to them. And, secondly, if we assume that the distinction Melden has in mind is actually a distinction between two schemes of concepts or, perhaps, two language games, it is difficult to understand how one might move from this fact -- if it be one — to a conclusion about the status of the events we use this language to refer to. Indeed, it can be argued that if some sort of fallacy is involved in all of this, a far more plausible candidate is to be located in Melden's move from talk about the logical properties of the language or concepts we use in describing or referring to human events to conclusions concerning the properties of these events themselves.

Melden's analysis has to do with his further muddying of these waters by introducing, or at least appearing to introduce, another distinction; this time between doings and actions or, perhaps, between doings and simple actions. But because this, too, is left unexplained the whole problem is further obscured. In consequence, I conclude my discussion of this phase of Melden's inquiry by suggesting that, while he does alert us to the possibility of there being an important distinction between simple actions and bodily movements, or physiological happenings, he has, to that stage at any rate, offered no clear indication of how this might be effected.

In Chapter III, I continue my examination of Melden's efforts to develop and defend a distinction between "the things one does" and "the things that happen to one" — a distinction he seems prepared to treat as equivalent to the one between "simple actions and mere bodily movements".[4] In this chapter, I outline what has come to be known as "the logical connection argument". This is an argument, developed by Melden himself, meant to show that theories of human action which seek to account for the distinctiveness of actions by appeal to the fact that they are caused by prior mental events, i.e., acts of will or volitions, are fundamentally mistaken. Although his immediate targets are the theories propounded by certain Neo-Cartesian philosophers, especially H.A. Pritchard, it is pretty clear that Melden is out to

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[4] I no longer am so confident about the possibilities for this project. Indeed, I am now inclined to think that any attempt to identify actions with "things one does", and bodily movements with "things that happen to one", when what is envisaged is some simple grammatical criterion for marking off doings from happenings, is doomed to failure.

demolish any analysis which treats an action as a consequence of antecedent goings on. In other words, he seems inclined to treat it as a general indictment of theories which attempt to explain the uniqueness of actions by appeal to a special order of causes. He argues that the connection between an action on the one hand, and an act of will or a volition on the other, is logical, and so cannot be causal. Interestingly, this is the first point at which we encounter Melden criticizing a position that grants his basic point; namely, that actions (or doings?) and mere bodily movements (happenings?) are events of fundamentally different kinds. And, it is also during this phase of the discussion that he begins to give us some idea of how he thinks the difference between actions and bodily movements is to be explained.

According to Melden (and here he is in the company of a number of other philosophers, including R.S. Peters and Peter Winch), what is distinctive about human behaviour that counts as action is the fact that it is governed by rules. Action occurs, in his words, "... in the context of practices in which rules are obeyed, criteria employed, (and) policies ... observed -- ...".[5] Thus, for example, the driver who raises his arm when he approaches an intersection may be said to be performing an action, i.e., signalling a turn, because his behaviour is governed by a certain rule of the road, which, in turn, is embedded with in a wider framework or context, of social conventions, policies and practices. At this stage, I indicate that I still harbour a number of rather serious misgivings about this account of the difference between actions and mere bodily happenings. In the first place, if,

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[5]Melden, op. cit., p. 73.

with Melden, we assume that in order to perform an action a person must follow or obey some rule or other, then we shall find ourselves hard pressed to distinguish between someone's raising their arm just because they feel like it and their arms rising as a result of a nervous impulse. Neither represent instances of rule following on a par with what the driver does in signalling. Are we to say, therefore, that they are nothing more than mere bodily movements or physiological happenings? The general point I make concerning this version of the rule following model of action is that it places too much emphasis on the conventional or ceremonial aspects of human behaviour. A second, and to my mind, much more important difficulty with "The Contextual Theory of Action" (as I also describe it) is that it is fraught with vagueness. Rules are all the rage these days, especially in the social sciences. Psycholinguists use them in attempting to account for the knowledge speakers have of their native language. Sociologists and anthropologists make much of the role played by rules in a very broad range of human social behaviour. Yet, to return to Melden's analysis, one finds that in his case, just as in these others, very little has been done to address such fundamental and important issues as; the kinds of rules he has in mind, what makes rules 'social' in his sense, the way (or ways) in which rules enter into and influence actions or, indeed, what is involved in following or obeying a rule.

As a result, in Chapter IV I set out to examine the "contextual doctrine" in further depth. In stressing the role of rules in our actions, proponents of this view tend to trace the roots of our humanity back to the social arena. For it is there, they maintain,

that we learn to become distinctively human beings. Heavy emphasis is placed by Melden and the others on the learning of language and other "uniquely social skills" in circumstances governed by rules and roles. In reference to this attempt to account for the social character of rules a number of points are made. The first, is that, while we may readily admit that persons begin, as it were, by acquiring social qualities, there is no reason to suppose that all of the qualities they ultimately come to manifest, including many of the actions they perform, must necessarily be governed by codes or conventions. Creative persons, or those who merely close the door because they happen to feel like it, behave in the absence or in ignorance of rules -- at least the kinds of rules that appear to be of so much concern to Melden and other contextualists. Are we then to say that, because their behaviour occurs independently of social rules, it must be treated on a par with a knee-jerk. I maintain that it is not. The second and more important point to be made in connection with this account of the distinction between actions and bodily movements is that it appears viciously circular. That is to say, if to follow or obey a rule *is* to perform an action then the notion of rule-following cannot be invoked in the analysis of action. I conclude the chapter by arguing that, these additional explanations notwithstanding, the contextualists proposal will not suffice for distinguishing action and bodily movements.

Chapter V is taken up with a concept of action formulated by Professor H.L.A. Hart from what may be called a legal point of view. Hart's position is similar to the'Contextualists' in that he,

likewise, believes that social rules, in particular, "accepted rules of conduct",play an essential role in our understanding of human action. Beyond this, however, the two theories of action differ rather dramatically. To begin with, Hart contends that many of the difficulties besetting both traditional and contemporary treatments of the nature of human action spring from the common, but erroneous, assumption that action is a descriptive concept. On Hart's view, by contrast, action and related concepts are more appropriately understood as being analogous to certain types concepts employed in legal discourse. For Hart, action is what he terms "an ascriptive concept". He writes, "The sentence 'I did it'. 'you did it', 'he did it' are, I suggest, primarily utterances with which we *confess* or *admit* liability, make accusations, or *ascribe* responsibility; ...".[6] Hence, for example, when we say of someone that 'He hit her', then, according to Hart, we are not, at least not primarily, describing what has gone on. On the contrary, to say 'He hit her' or, more generally, 'He did X' is to ascribe or assign liability or responsibility to the person named as subject for what has transpired.

Moreover, Hart maintains that action concepts are analogous to legal concepts in another important and interesting respect. That is, like their legal counterparts, action concepts are, according to Hart, defeasible. By this he means that a claim like 'he hit her' may be reduced or over-ridden completely -- viz., defeated, if it can be shown that he did so accidentally, inadvertently, by mistake, in self

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[6]H.L.A. Hart, 'The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights,' in A. Flew (ed.), Logic and Language (First and Second Series) (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 167. Emphasis in original.

defense, under great provocation, or that any one of an indefinite list of exceptions, or extentuating circumstances, obtained at the time.

Thus, Hart also seems to think that there is an essential difference between actions and bodily movements simpliciter. From his point of view, the difference is to be accounted for by the fact that human actions, as distinct from the mere bodily movements persons sometimes undergo, are the sorts of things for which persons may be ascribed responsibility. I begin my critique of Hart's position by pointing out that it is not at all clear what he has in mind when he talks about responsibility. The problem here goes back to one of the key issues raised in our earlier discussion of certain important Ethical and Meta-ethical questions about actions; namely, what does it mean to say of someone that they are responsible for an action? As it functions in much of our discourse about human action, 'responsibility' has both descriptive and evaluative uses. Which of these does Hart have in mind when he asserts that to say 'He did it' is primarily to ascribe responsibility to a person for something done? The more plausible reading of his proposal is, I suggest, the one which derives from interpreting 'responsibility' in its evaluative sense. In other words, to say that someone is responsible for an action in this sense is to say that he is liable or accountable for what takes place. Now if we understand his proposal in this way, Hart seems to be claiming that our actions are just those bodily movements for which one is held responsible or brought to account. Thus, it seems that if we are to follow Hart, we must assume that, in getting up, having my morning coffee and reading the newspaper, for example, I cannot be said to have

performed an action, unless something untoward, such as my scalding my wife by spilling the coffee, takes place. On the other hand, it also seems to follow from this analysis that were someone to bring me to account for the rising of my arm, perhaps because they believe me to be making a public spectacle of myself, then that movement would count as an action I perform. In short, my point is that it seems to be a mistake to try to explicate the difference between my raising my arm and my arms rising by appealing to my accountability for the movement in the one case but not in the other. Indeed, it can be argued that the concept of responsibility Hart calls upon in his analysis already presupposes the concept of action -- in which case the entire enterprise in self-defeating. Finally, I draw attention to the fact that neither Melden or Hart appear to entertain the possibility that some of the actions performed by human agents are actions which involve no bodily movements. This I suspect is an immediate consequence of the fact that both seek to elucidate the difference between action and non-action not so much from the active and internal perspective of the agent as from the relatively passive and external point of view of the spectator.

Chapter VI is devoted to the examination of the position of Richard Taylor who maintains that the difference between by raising my arm and my arms rising is to be found, not in the circumstances surrounding the movement, nor in the conventions under which it may fall, but rather in the source of ancestry of what takes place. When my arm goes up we can account for that bodily happening by tracing it back to an event or perhaps a series of events. This is efficient causation.

In contrast, when I raise my arm the source or cause of the movement is an agent, who is an object or a thing (a person), not an event. This, Taylor maintains, is final or Agent Causation.

But the notion of an objects standing in a causal relationship to an event is surely very obscure. What does it mean to say that an agent causes an event? Taylor's reply to this question is to say that the concept of agency or agent causation cannot be informatively analyzed in terms of anything more basic -- it is a fundamental category. We can, nevertheless, go on to say some illuminating things about my role as agent in reference to my actions. "Every man", Taylor writes, "seems sometimes to know, within himself -- ... which motions and changes in his body are within his immediate control and which are not".[7] In other words, he seems to believe that 'being an agent of an event', and 'knowing what events are under one's immediate control' are synonymous expressions, and so one cannot yield a basis or ground for the other. But this should not be taken to mean that this analysis cannot be justified. Rather, what is required is a justification of a different kind. According, to Taylor the basis or justification for the Theory or Agency is primarily intuitive -- viz., grounded one's experience as an active agent, not as a passive spectator to the human scene. Or to put it somewhat differently, for Taylor the crucial difference between a bodily movement that is an action and a bodily movement that is not, is to be located within the perspective of the agent.

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[7] R. Taylor, Action and Purpose (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 87.

In concluding this inquiry in Chapter VII, I have outlined what I take to be the relevance of the kinds of issues that fall under the rubrics of "the philosophy of action" or "action theory" for the theory and practice of education. My aims in this chapter are threefold. First, I have tried to show that there are vital, yet so far virtually undeveloped, connections between action theory, on the one hand, and educational theory and practice on the other. Second, I have attempted to show that there are broad areas of educational concern that can be fruitfully explored from the perspective of action theory. And, finally, I have sought to draw attention to particular problem areas within education in which I think research of this sort needs to be conducted.

CHAPTER II

SIMPLE ACTIONS, BODILY MOVEMENTS AND PHYSIOLOGICAL HAPPENINGS

I shall begin my inquiry into the concept of human action by examining a series of accounts which seek quite directly to deal with the problem of action as it was posed by Wittgenstein. Not only do the philosophers whose views I shall be discussing in the next three chapters share with Wittgenstein a general philosophical perspective, one sometimes referred to by the misleading epithet "ordinary language philosophy", but they also appear to endorse some of his views concerning the nature of language and its role in human activities. Some commentators have characterized this way of treating questions about human action as "contextual", in order to draw attention to a feature distinctive of this type of account; namely, the idea that, over and above the behaviour itself, one must also take into consideration the circumstances or context in which the behaviour occurs if one is to provide an adequate analysis of the concept of action.

Briefly, and by way of introduction, let me try to be a bit more explicit about what this view involves. Defenders of a contextualist account of human action generally take the position that when a person performs an action -- for example, when a driver signals a turn (by raising his arm) -- we must, in order to properly describe what transpires, focus attention not only on the various bodily movements that

occur but also upon the norms, rules and standards which enter into and in important respects guide the performance in question. Accordingly, when a driver signals a turn, certain norms or rules, e.g., rules of the road, traffic regulations, and so on, form an important part of the context in which the action is performed. In other words, inasmuch as these norms, rules, etc., are inextricably bound up with what the driver does in signalling, reference to them as well as to the movements of his body is crucial in any adequate accounting of what he is engaged in doing.

In examining this theory, I want to pay particular attention to that version of it that has been painstakingly developed and defended by A.I. Melden.[1] Nevertheless, as the discussion progresses I shall also have occasion to consider, though in much less detail, the views of R.S. Peters and Peter Winch who, along with Melden, may be seen to share a number of fundamental ideas concerning the nature of actions.[2]

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[1] In examining Melden's position I will draw in large measure on his principal work in this area Free Action (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), although his paper 'Action,' in D.F. Gustafson (ed.), Essays in Philosophical Psychology (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1964), pp. 58-76, is very helpful in clearing up some of the puzzles in the longer work.

[2] It is my intention here neither to minimize nor to obscure the differences in the views of R.S. Peters, The Concept of Motivation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958); P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958) and Melden. Owing to the differing concerns with which each man approaches questions having to do with human behaviour there are, to be sure, significant differences among them. Nevertheless, it would seem fair to say that, in virtue of the shared notions of rule-following, context, and so on, as they relate to human conduct, they may be grouped under the title of "contextual accounts of action".

Melden's inquiry into human action unfolds in two separate though closely related stages. During the first stage, he goes to considerable lengths in trying to determine whether and on what basis we might distinguish the actions performed by persons from other events taking place within the human organism. And, in the second phase, he engages in a detailed examination of the ways in which we ordinarily talk about the actions we perform in our everyday dealings with one another. The aim here is to show that norms or rules have a very important role to play when it somes to distinguishing actions from other events occurring in persons. My plan, is to examine as fully as possible in the space available both aspects of Melden's work. In taking this tack, I shall try to counterbalance a tendency prevalent in much of the contemporary literature on action. This is the tendency, displayed by a number of commentators, to dwell exclusively on one or the other of these parts of Melden's account, ra-ther than viewing them as interrelated elements of a larger enterprise. The point of approaching matters in this fashion is to try to gain a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of what Melden is up to so that in the end we shall be in a better position to determine its merits.

In the present chapter I shall restrict my attention to the initial phase of Melden's theorizing; namely, his explorations of the need and possible basis for a distinction between actions and other events which comprise the history of a person. Now, because he has gone about this important job in so thorough-going a manner I think it essential that we try to get clear about his conclusions.

Unfortunately, however, as will become evident as we proceed, this is no simple task. Consequently, a good deal of the discussion in this chapter will be taken up with the business of trying to sort out just what Melden has to say concerning this distinction. This will help to set the stage for the ensuing discussion of the importance of conventions, norms and rules in our discourse about human actions.

Melden construes Wittgenstein's now famous query, "What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?",[3] as a request for an account of the difference between matters of bodily or physiological happening and matters of human action. The rising of one's arm, it is suggested, is to be regarded as something that *happens* in or to me, whereas, my raising my arm is something I may be said to *do*.[4]

How is Melden's view of the distinction (or distinctions) between bodily or physiological happenings and actions, and/or between the things persons do and the things that happen to them, to be understood? And, upon what is the distinction based? We can become clearer

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[3] L. Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), #621, p. 161e.

[4] Melden, Free Action, p. 9. A similar distinction is proposed by Peters, The Concept of Motivation, pp. 9-12. Peters maintains that actions are things that one does, and are to be contrasted with those items of human behaviour which are merely "goings on" in the individual. In his words, "a genuine action is the act of doing something as opposed to suffering something", p. 12. The basis for Peters' distinction is the view that human actions do not admit of sufficient explanation in terms of causal laws; whereas happenings can be sufficiently explained in terms of cause and effect.

about how he might attempt to answer these questions if, first, we consider some of the preliminary explorations that have lead him to put the problem in these terms. Let us begin by looking at an example similar to one Melden himself has used in this connection. A connoisseur, call him Mr. C., is attending an auction of fine paintings. At some time during the proceedings, say at 5:48 p.m., our man of refined tastes makes a bid on one of the paintings offered up for sale. We might further assume that he does so by nodding his head. Of course it is likely that since his arrival at the auction he has performed very many other actions, some of which might be characterized in a general way as 'examining the paintings', 'renewing old acquaintances', 'scrutinizing the bidding', and so on. In any case, by singling out one action from among the many he has performed we can bring to light these features Melden considers pertinent to the distinction between "doing" and "happening". And, finally, we might suppose, that on recognizing the gesture made by Mr. C., the auctioneer says something to the effect that, "We now have an offer of such-and-such on the Van Gogh".

Melden begins by noting that episodes of the sort outlined above can be described in at least three different ways. First, we might say that, 'At precisely 5:48 p.m. Mr. C. made a bid of such-and-such an amount on the Van Gogh'. Secondly, in response to the question 'How did Mr. C. make the bid?' a reply characterizing what transpired may take the form 'He made a bid on the painting by nodding his head' -- this is how it was done. Or to put it in more general terms, Melden thinks that whenever someone performs an action describable as,

say, 'making an offer on a painting', he also does something which may be described in another way, for example, as 'nodding one's head'. So it is with many other performances of a similar sort. Here are some additional illustrations: taking an oath by raising one's right hand and repeating the appropriate form of words, acknowledging His Majesty by bowing in a certain way, signalling a turn by raising an arm and so on. In each of these cases, the model one does X by doing Y, where 'X' and 'Y' are not synonymous expressions, seems appropriate for describing what has taken place. Furthermore, Melden suggests, there is yet a third way in which we may describe what went on in the art auction at this particular time. Whenever one nods one's head, certain muscles located in the neck contract while others relax in such a way that the head is successively elevated and lowered. Consequently, it might also be said that 'At such-and-such a time certain muscle movements occurred' -- this is how Mr. C.'s head gets nodded.

In short, the point here is that it seems possible to describe what took place on that occasion by saying that 'Mr. C. made a bid on the Van Gogh', or that 'Mr. C. nodded his head', or, again, that 'Certain muscle movements in Mr. C.'s neck occurred'. Now, assuming that what took place at 5:48 p.m. can be described in these ways, a number of important questions arise. To begin with, 'Can these accounts be regarded as different descriptions of the same happening?'. Or, are they to be treated as descriptions of distinct happenings?

How many actions do these sentences record?[5] And, finally, how do Melden's answers to these questions help to throw light or his distinction between "doings" and "happenings".

Let us begin by considering Melden's view of the relationship between the events picked out by the first pair of sentences, viz., by 'Mr. C. made a bid on the Van Gogh' and 'He nodded his head'. It is his contention that, although they are not synonymous, these sentences are related in the sense that the latter makes it clear how the former was done. That is, the expression 'by nodding his head' informs us how Mr. C. made his bid on the painting. Furthermore, it would also appear that were we to inquire 'What did Mr. C. do on the occasion in question?' either the reply that 'He nodded his head' or that 'He made a bid on the painting' would be an appropriate answer to our question. Both tell us what the agent did. But how many things did Mr. C. do? How many actions did he perform during this episode? In replying to this sort of question Melden appears to have taken the line that it is implausible to suppose that, in episodes such as these, there is more than one occurrence. For one does not nod one's head in order to make a bid, in the way one climbs a ladder in order to replace a light bulb.[6]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 19-20. The problems to which Melden has drawn attention here, i.e., of whether a single action can be described in many different ways and of when actions are the same and when different, are issues which have generated a good deal of discussion and controversey of late in the literature on action. For a sampling of this discussion see D. Davidson, 'The Individuation of Events,' in N. Rescher, et. al. (eds.), Essays in Honor of Carl G. Hempel (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969) and A. Goldman, J.J. Thompson and I. Thalberg, 'The Individuation of Action,' Journal of Philosophy, Vol. LXVIII (1971), pp. 761-87.

[6] Free Action, pp. 20-21.

In the latter case at least two distinct things are done, one of them being done as a prerequisite to the doing of the other. By contrast, when Mr. C. makes a bid on the Van Gogh by nodding his head, it seems sensible to suppose that there is only one thing that he does. And, as a result, it seems reasonable to conclude that, for Melden at least, the relation between the events picked out by these two expressions is one of identity.

If next we turn to examine the relationship between 'nodding one's head' and 'the occurrence of certain muscular movements', there may be a temptation to construe it on the same model as that between the first pair of descriptions. That is, as an instance of doing X by doing Y. After all, it does seem evident that whenever one nods one's head it is also the case that various muscle movements take place. Can we then say that the model of someones doing X by doing Y is appropriate in these circumstances and, in consequence, that the relationship between these sentences, and the events to which they refer, is the same as that between the first pair? At this stage, it becomes clear that in order to answer these questions we must first come to terms with a more fundamental issue; namely, the question of whether or not the expression 'such-and-such muscle movements occurring' is a description of something that a person may be said to *do*.

It can be seen that an important upshot of these preliminary explorations is to raise, in one form at least, what I have referred to in the Introduction as "The Problem of Action". On the basis of the discussion thus far, the problem, as Melden initially conceives of it, appears to be one of determining whether the occurrence of certain

muscle movements is to be counted as something a person does. He subsequently goes on to cast the net more widely in observing that;

> Whenever I do anything, something happens, but since indefinitely many things happen when I do anything, only some of which are relevant to my doing, the happening in question must be further delimited.[7]

How is this remark to be understood? One way of interpreting it, it seems, is as suggesting that the sentence 'Such-and-such muscle movements took place' is not a description of a "doing"; it is, by contrast, report of a "happening". In other words, it may be understood as asserting that to say a certain muscle movement took place is merely to say that something happened in or to a person. As such, it carries with it no implication that such movements are things one does. And, from this it would follow that the model of an agents doing X by doing Y is inapplicable to episodes of the sort recorded by the second pair of descriptions. Nevertheless, as we shall see in a moment, there are other ways in which this comment can be interpreted.

Clearly then the purport of Melden's claim is not as clear and straight forward as one would hope. Yet, because it is central to his view not only of the distinction between doing and happening but also of the problem of action it bears closer scrutiny. One of the things Melden seems to be saying is that while certain of the things that happen when a person does something are, in some sense, "relevant" to that doing, there remain others that are not. At this juncture, it is appropriate to ask, 'In what does this "relevance" consist?'. Or to put it another way, how are we to distinguish between those happenings

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[7] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

which are and those which are not relevant to things done by human agents? This is an important question. And it serves to reveal an important ambiguity in Melden's position. In order to throw this problem into sharper relief let us consider another example. Suppose that, whilst I am seated at my desk, I do something, such as reach for my pen. And let us further assume that in the course of doing so the change in my pocket jingles, my glasses slip forward on my nose, the chair upon which I am sitting "groans", and so on. Here many things happen when I reach for my pen. Are such things as the jingling of the change, the movement of my glasses or the groaning of my chair the sorts of happening Melden has in mind when he speaks of happenings that may or may not be relevant to my doing? Surely these are among the sorts of thing that can and very often do happen when a person does something.

But this does not seem to be what Melden means. Instead, his primary concern in this context seems to have more to do with happenings of the kind involved in our original example. If we examine the three descriptions generated in connection with that episode it seems reasonably clear that they are used to record events taking place in the human organism. On the other hand, the things that happen as I reach for my pen, e.g., the groaning of my chair, are things which occur "in the world" (beyond the boundaries of my skin, as it were) as a result of my doing. Presumably, it is for this reason, or something like this kind of reason, that Melden is prepared to disregard "external happenings" when he talks about happenings that are and happenings that are not relevant to the things one does. So, it would seem that

when he speaks of happenings he is actually referring to events taking place "within" the person who is performing the action.

Having gotten a little clearer about Melden's notion of a happening, we are in a better position to see what is involved when he contrasts the things persons do with the things that happen to them. From what has been said thus far, it appears that for Melden the problem is one of separating doings from other kinds of happing *taking place within the human organism.* Additional support for this way of understanding his is provided by his claim that,

> A very great number of physiological events take place, happen, get done when one raises one's arm; but it not only makes sense to ask whether these are things one does, it is in fact questionable that this is the case. If so, we cannot identify what happens, gets done, with what a person does.[8]

Here it seems evident that the contrast Melden is interested in developing is one between doings and physiological happenings, as distinct from the kinds of "external" happenings in which an agent's doings may issue.

Assuming that there are important differences between physiological happenings and the things one does, it now becomes essential to understand what, on the present view of things, these differences amount to. How, in other words, or on what basis, are we to mark off the things we do from those things that merely happen to us? On this matter, Melden takes the position that our talk about human doings differs in fundamental or radical ways from our talk about physiological happenings, including the observable movements of our limbs, the blinkings of eyes, the movements of lips and so on. That we cannot

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[8] Ibid., p. 56.

identify these two types of talk, or forms of discourse, is, Melden believes, indicative of the existence of a gap between matters of physiological happening and matters of human doing that is strictly analogous to the logical gulf in moral philosophy between 'Is' and 'Ought'. Now if Melden is right about this, it would seem that he would also wish to maintain that talk about physiological happenings is *ipso facto* irrelevant to talk about the things persons do. Yet, there are occasions on which he seems reluctant to drive the wedge this deeply. That is to say, there are, as we shall see, times when Melden talks as if physiological happenings are in some sense "part of" the things persons do. Or, to put it more precisely, Melden sometimes conveys the impression that the language we use in talking about happenings is under certain circumstances somehow "germane" to the language we employ in our talk about doings.

At this stage, we have before us a rather rough sketch of Melden's view of the distinction between the things one does and the things that happen to one. However, in reference to a task of the complexity of the present one, much still remains to be sorted out if we are to come up with a reasonably clear and coherent picture of Melden's position. To this end we shall need to become a good deal clearer about his distinction between "doings" and "happenings", since, as I have previously remarked, some confusion concerning this matter still lingers. With this in mind, I want first to examine his arguments against certain attempts to bridge this gulf. And, secondly, I would like to consider a point made by some of his critics that it is not at all clear that Melden does in fact identify the things persons do and actions; a

point which, if well founded, raises serious doubts about the relevance of a distinction between doings and happenings to the problem of action. By looking into these matters further, perhaps enough light can be shed on these difficulties that at least some of them can be dispelled.

The fact that people have tried in various ways to bridge the gap between doings and happenings is, Melden believes, symptomatic of the kind of conceptual confusion that has tended to surround these notions. From among these attempts he has singled out two of the more prominent ones as being of special interest. On the one hand, there is a view of those (principally, certain physiologists and behaviouristically inclined psychologists committed to very simple-minded forms of empiricism) who assume that it is possible to give a complete account of any and all bodily happenings in terms of physiological causes. And, on the other, he is concerned with a view propounded by certain Neo-Cartesian philosophers (presumably including Prichard[9]) to the effect that bodily movements, considered by themselves, cannot be described as actions performed by an agent. Nevertheless, if such movements are preceded and caused by a certain type of mental event, i.e., by an act of will or a volition, then, according to this view, we are entitled to construe the bodily movement as an action. It is in a similar vein that some physiologists and psychologists have argued that when a person performs an action, for example nodding one's head, the bodily movement is the causal consequence of some

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[9] H.A. Prichard, 'Acting, Willing and Desiring,' in A.R. White (ed.), The Philosophy of Action (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 65.

antecedent and interior *doing* in which the agent engages, such as moving one's muscles. In short, both accounts are based on the assumption that actions are distinguishable from physiological happenings in virtue of the fact that the former, unlike the latter, are brought about by a certain kind of cause; namely, by something the agent does.

Melden raises some rather serious objections to these particular efforts at spanning the conceptual gulf. Against this version of the theory of volitions, he argues that the event described as my nodding my head is not the effect of some prior mental cause such as my willing my head to nod. The reason for rejecting this supposition is, he argues, that mental events, including acts of volition or willings, are not related to actions as cause to effect; rather the connection between them is a logical one.[10] Moreover to seek, by combining a bodily happening with a mental cause (albeit a mental event construed as a doing) to transform a happening such as the nodding of my head into the action characterized as my nodding my head is again fundamentally mistaken. For here the suggestion is that one causes one's head to nod by performing a willing; thus by citing the antecedent event which brought about my heads nodding we explain the occurrence in question. But what is it that we have thereby explained? According to Melden, it is merely the fact that one's head nods; not that one nods one's head. Consequently, if we succeed in explaining anything at all by such a move, we have, so Melden maintains, explained only

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[10] For a more detailed discussion and defense of this claim see Free Action particularly chapters VIII and IX. I do not intend to pursue the details of the argument here since I am merely seeking to bring out the character of the dispute in order to further illuminate Melden's attempt to distinguish between doings and happenings.

a bodily happening and not an action performed by an agent. Hence, he concludes that, on the volitional theory the gap between action and happening remains untouched.

The step taken by those supporting the physiological version of the thesis in question involves the presumption that one nods one's head by contracting one's muscles -- this is how one does it. Accordingly, it would also seem to follow that one contracts one's muscles, stimulates certain centres in the brain, effects the firing of certain neurons, and so on, in precisely the same fashion as one switches on the tape recorder by depressing a certain button, places the transmission in reverse by manipulating the gear shift lever, etc. As such, it appears as if one must know some physiology in order to be aware or recognize that by contracting this muscle in such a way I may succeed in causing my head to nod, just as one must know something of the workings of tape recorders and automobiles in order that one might succeed in getting them to operate in the ways described above. At this point, Melden maintains, the analogy breaks down and reveals the error in this proposal. Surely one needs no prior knowledge of, or training in, physiology in order to move one's limbs, we simply nod our heads, raise our arms, wiggle our toes and so on without manipulating any intervening devices. And, more importantly, one does not nod one's head by moving certain muscles. On the contrary, it is by nodding one's head that one moves certain muscles! Here, in other words, the causal sequence needs to be reversed. Accounts, such as those just considered, which seek to relate doings (either mental or physiological) to happenings as cause to effect, provide a picture of

human actions *as if* they were the result of the manipulation, by the agent, of certain internal levers and pulleys -- a picture which, to say the least, is characterized by a number of rather misleading and unfortunate distortions.

In any event, the main reason for looking at these attempts to bridge the conceptual gap has been to seek to make out more clearly Melden's distinction between doings and happenings and to determine how it bears upon his analysis of human action. What has been accomplished thus far? In the first place, it is worth noting that Melden is concerned to discredit the volitional theory and those physiological or psychological accounts of actions committed to the notion that in cases of human action, *doings in which agent himself engages* intervene in the course of physiological events and cause some bodily movement.[11] Here, then, it seems that Melden is claiming that the relationship, whatever it is, between doings and physiological happenings is not causal. However, this makes his view of the relationship between bodily movements and physiological happenings is even less clear. Nevertheless, in concluding his critique of the doing intervenes in physiology analysis of action he does remark that, " ... there is undoubtedly a difference between a matter of physiological happening and a bodily movement that is correctly describable as something done by the agent".[12] This ambiguous comment brings us face to face with a central difficulty in this phase of his analysis. It has to do with the scope of the terms 'action', 'bodily movement' and 'doing' and the manner in

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[11] Ibid., p. 57.

[12] Ibid.

which they are to be distinguished from each other, and in turn from 'physiological happenings'. The lack of clarity surrounding Melden's talk about these matters, has led to his positions being interpreted in a number of quite different and incompatible ways. The upshot of this is that his view has become beclouded by a number of perplexities which, if one is to make some sense of his position, must be resolved.

One way in which this statement might quite reasonably be understood is as suggesting that there is an important distinction between actions and the things one does. Macklin[13] is one observer who believes that Melden's comments lend themselves readily to such an interpretation. On her view, he can be understood as maintaining that bodily movements, as distinct from physiological happenings (e.g., "muscular contractions and interior bodily events"), may be regarded as things that one does.[14] Assuming that this is what Melden does have in mind, then the relation between the things done by persons and their actions is, indeed, unclear. It may be that only some of the things one does can be construed as actions, the remainder of one's doings consisting in the execution of "mere bodily movements". A second interpretation, also proposed by Macklin, is that Melden can be taken to be claiming that everything one does is to be counted as an action. In support of this view she draws attention to his assertion that,

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[13] Ruth Macklin, 'Doing and Happening,' The Review of Metaphysics, XXII (1968), p. 249.

[14] Ibid., pp. 249-50.

> It should be clear now that not every physiological happening in the chain of causes that issue in the motion of one's arm is a case of something done. For only in very special circumstances can such a happening be described as an action.[15]

If one supposes, along with Macklin, that his remarks are intended to explicate the connection between doings and actions, then this latter comment would seem to imply that actions are the only things a person may legitimately be said to do:

On this way of looking at things, the nature of the relationship, if any, between doings or actions, on the one hand, and bodily movements or physiological happenings, on the other, remains something of a mystery. In any case, owing to the variety of interpretations to which Melden's views seemingly admit, she has concluded that, on the face of it, his account is, " ... open to the charge of inconsistency or, at least, lack of clarity on this point".[16]

There is, it can readily be acknowledged, a certain amount of obscurity associated with Melden's talk about actions, doings, bodily movements, physiological happenings and so on. And, it can also be agreed that there seem to be important problems in his analysis. What is not so clear, however, is that the remarks upon which Macklin has focused attention are problematic for the reasons she suggests. Indeed, as I shall argue a little later, there is another way of looking at Melden's views on this subject in virtue of which some of Macklin's points loose a good deal of their force. With this end in view, I want now to consider a special case of the sort to which Melden alludes in his comments.

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[15] Melden, op. cit., p. 64.

[16] Macklin, op. cit., pp. 249-50.

By a "special case" or "special circumstances", Melden is referring to those perhaps infrequent occasions on which something one does might be described as 'causing a happening in or to the agent himself'. Suppose, for example, that I am sitting in a cinema in such a position that the circulation of blood in one of my legs is inhibited and that, as a result, my leg "goes to sleep". At some point, having tired of the discomfort of feeling "pins and needles", I may decide to cross my "sleeping" leg over my other one. In order to accomplish this result, instead of simply raising my leg in such-and-such a way, I may lift the dormant limb by using my arms. And, following the execution of a number of simple manoeuvres, I achieve the desired effect. In this context the bodily happening, i.e., causing certain muscles to move, can quite correctly be regarded as something I do. Since by performing various operations with my arms and hands (e.g., lifting, pulling, etc.,) I managed to cause my leg and certain muscles in my leg to move. In other words, in circumstances such as these, it seems perfectly in order to describe what took place by saying 'I moved certain muscles (in my leg) by raising my arm' -- this tells us how it was done. Thus, in answer to the question, 'What did you do?', I could quite properly respond by saying either that 'I raised my arm' or that 'I moved my leg'. From what has been said thus far, it now becomes clearer why Melden might be prepared to declare that this incident is special in certain key respects, and why, too, one of Macklin's interpretations of his position may lack some of the plausibility she has claimed for it.

If one examines the context in which these problematical comments

are made it seems to me that a good case can be made out for claiming that Melden's primary concern in this part of his account lies with things persons do, as it were, *directly* or *immediately*. On the other hand, the special case in which I may be said to move certain muscles by raising my arm is an instance of something that is done indirectly. What I am suggesting, then, is that it is circumstances of this sort that Melden has in mind when he says that it is only in special circumstances that the movement of one's muscles or certain other physiological happenings can be described as something done by an agent. In normal circumstances, by contrast such physiological occurrences would be considered as things that happen to one.

Let us examine this matter a little more closely. To begin with, it should be evident that there are important differences between this type of situation in which a person may be said to do X by doing Y, and those of the sort typified by a connoisseurs making a bid on a painting by nodding his head. Prior to this, it will be recalled, Melden's discussion has centered on doings such as the raising of an arm, the nodding of one's head, the lifting of a leg and so on. From this,it seems to me eminently reasonable to conclude that his primary concern is with what might be termed "simple doings" or, to use Melden's words, "things immediately done by us".[17] On the other hand, when he speaks of special circumstances he quite clearly has episodes

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[17]Melden's conception of 'things immediately done by us' is similar to that developed by A.C. Danto. 'Basic Actions,' in A.R. White (ed.), The Philosophy of Action (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 44-46, when he speaks of 'basic actions'. According to Danto, a basic action is an action such that, " ... a man performing one does not cause it by performing some other action that stands to it as cause to effect". (p. 46)

of a very different sort in mind. If I move certain muscles in my leg by raising my arm then I may be said to have moved certain muscles. But in situations of this sort, I do not move those muscles directly or immediately; rather I do so only indirectly by doing something else first, such as raising an arm. Therefore, what serves to make episodes like these special and thus set them off from those in which a driver signals a turn by raising an arm, or a connoisseur makes a bid on a painting by nodding his head, is the fact 'X' and 'Y' are not descriptions of the same event. To be more precise, the sentences 'I raised my arm' and 'I moved my leg', as they are used in connection with the present example, do not describe the same event in the way that 'Mr. C. nodded his head' and 'Mr. C. made a bid on the painting', as used in the context of the first example, do describe one and the same event. In other words, unlike the case in which someone nods their head so as to make a bid, what we have here is a situation in which I raise my arm in order to move my leg, which suggests that it is a more "complex doing" or perhaps, that it is an episode comprised of distinct doings or at least distinct events. In short, the special case acquires its uniqueness in virtue of its being set in contrast to the species of doing which has been the principal object of Melden's analyses thus far, namely, "simple doings". In this way the special case is best construed not on the model of an arm raising, but rather as being more closely parallel to, though not on precisely the same footing as, a case of someone's climbing a ladder to replace a lightbulb, where at least two things are being done by the agent.

Thus, I would maintain that Melden is addressing himself in the remarks

in question, not as Macklin suggests, to the problem of the relationship between doings and actions, but, instead, to the separation of action and happening. In short, the thesis being advanced seems rather to be that happenings in or to a person can under special circumstances be regarded as something one does; although they are not things he does directly or immediately in the way that he raises an arm. Accordingly, when certain "unusual" or extraordinary conditions obtain, expressions such as 'I moved certain muscles' or 'I caused certain muscles to move' may be construed as descriptions of something a person does. On the other hand, in normal circumstances, we should be prepared to regard talk about mere muscle or limb movements etc., as talk about what happens to a person, viz., about physiological happenings. But, and this is the point that needs to be underlined here, from the fact that under certain conditions persons may be described as causing certain movements in their limbs or muscles, or as moving those limbs or muscles, and the fact we are prepared to treat such descriptions as accounts of things persons do (even though they seem quite clearly to make reference to physiological happenings), we should not be lead to conclude that some of the things persons do are not actions, but, rather, the execution of mere bodily movements. For to take this line would commit us to the view Melden has been at pains to criticize; namely, the view that the events described by sentences like 'I moved the muscles in my leg' or 'I caused the muscles in my leg to move', on the one hand, and by sentences such as 'The muscles in my leg moved', on the other, are on precisely the same footing with respect to their status as happenings, and that they differ only in

that the former represents a doing whereas the latter does not. Against this account, I have been arguing that Melden is best understood as claiming that while 'I raise my leg' and 'I cause my leg to rise' may be said to refer to things I do or, equivalently, to my actions, they cannot be treated as picking out doings of the same sort; and, furthermore, that in neither case are the events thus described to be assimilated to a mere physiological happening or bodily movement, such as the movement of my leg when this is brought on by some internal physiological happening.

To see Melden's comments about special cases in this light, therefore, is to recognize that they are concerned with the status of happenings like the movements of muscles or limbs when they are brought about by something a person does. As a result, we can now regard the main issue as being that of determining whether the muscular and limb movements that do occur in these circumstances are to be counted as something that one does or something that happens to one. Moreover, given this rendering of Melden's position it seems quite plausible to suppose that he does in fact treat the notions of action and of things one does as equivalent. But having said this, I should hasten to point out that we do not by making this move eliminate the perplexities about which Macklin has spoken. Rather, at best, we manage only to relocate them.

Let me now begin to explicate in more detail what is involved in the second approach to interpreting Melden's misleading remark that " ... there is undoubtedly a difference between a matter of physiological happening and a bodily movement that is correctly describable as

something done by the agent", and the bearing of this interpretation on his account of the problem of action. The plausibility of this alternative reading depends on our adopting the view that his comment is addressed to the distinction between, actions (doings) and bodily movements, and not, as previously suggested, to the relationship between actions and the things done by persons. On the basis of this assumption, we can interpret Melden as holding that some, though not all, bodily movements may be characterized as things one does, or as actions. And from this it follows that there are certain other sorts of bodily movements which cannot be numbered among the actions performed by the agent. Seen from this perspective, the genesis of the confusion that has arisen in connection with this aspect of Melden's discussion is to be found in his employment of the concept of a bodily movement; particularly in his view of the relation of bodily movements to actions. In what follows, I shall try to show why I think this represents a much more plausible way of understanding Melden's assertions, mainly on the ground that they are more consistent with what else he has to say on this topic.

Once again let us begin by considering an example. Here we need not appeal to a situation involving a "complex doing", a case involving a simple doing will suffice. In particular, we might return to and focus once more on my plight as a theatre goer who is in a state of physical discomfort as a result of having been seated in certain position for a prolonged period. This time, however, let us imagine that, rather than engaging in the more complicated sorts of acrobatics outlined in the original example, I decide on a simpler strategy for

alleviating my suffering. And having done so I may forthwith raise one leg and place it over the other. Now it was noted, at the outset of this account, that whenever I raise my leg, or perform any other action of this sort, I move certain muscles. Nevertheless, to say that I move those muscles by raising my leg is not, Melden would wish to maintain, to say that the physiological happening characterized as a muscle movement is the causal consequence of yet another physiological event described as the rising of the leg. Under these circumstances, by contrast, the expression 'one moves certain muscles by moving one's leg', can be construed as a description of a matter of human action. In other words, 'I raise my leg' and 'I move certain muscles' are both reports of things that, in the present example, one may be said to do. 'The movement of certain muscles causes the elevation of the leg', on the other hand, is to be understood as a report of a matter of physiology or a mere happening. Here, as previously, we are again confronted with the gap about which Melden has spoken. In this illustration, the vital contrast is between the locutions 'my moving my leg' and 'my legs moving' which, it is said, belong to two distinctive forms of discourse; those of action and happening respectively. And it is for this reason that he maintains the two expressions cannot be identified.

The main object in this aspect of the inquiry has been to bring to light additional considerations which, in my view, lend support to the contention that the difficulty in making sense of Melden's position is one of getting clear about the way in which actions and bodily movements are to be distinguished. To summarize the argument thus far;

I have been maintaining that Melden takes the position that *only* actions may be counted as things persons do. In defense of this interpretation I have tried to show that his primary purpose in the first part of *Free Action* has been to mark off simple actions from bodily movements of other kinds. On this analysis, simple actions, which include arm raisings, head noddings, leg liftings and so on, are things one does immediately or straight-off without having to do something else first in order to bring them about. Mere bodily happenings or movements, by contrast, are describable in such terms as 'the rising of an arm', 'the elevation of a leg' and are not things one does. Rather they are nothing more than the effects of certain internal physiological happenings. In opposition to this view, Macklin has argued that there is another and equally plausible way of interpreting Melden's position, according to which he may be understood as claiming that some of the things a person does are his actions while others consist merely in the execution of bodily movements. From this she has gone on to conclude that, in virtue of the fact that this way of construing his remarks gives rise to two alternative and incompatible accounts of his position, what is most in need of unraveling is his view of the relation between doings and actions.

In contrast, it has been my contention that this latter interpretation lacks the plausibility Macklin has claimed for it, and that this can be shown by a careful examination of the particular context within which these controversial statements occur as well as of other comments he subsequently goes on to make on this same topic. To put the matter briefly, since in the first portion of the book Melden's

main interest is giving an account of things one does immediately or directly, such as raising one's arm, he has treated as "special cases", "those things one does", as it were, "indirectly". An example of a special case, viz., of something done indirectly, would be my causing my left arm to rise by raising it with my right. Under these circumstances, I may be said to cause certain muscles (in my left arm) to contract and certain others to relax; but not immediately. That is to say, I do this only by doing something else first, viz., by raising my right arm. And, this I think is precisely the point on which Macklin has been lead astray. For instead of recognizing that Melden considers sentences like 'I cause certain muscles to move' or 'I cause my arm to rise' as descriptions of extraordinary cases, she has construed them as accounts of something one does, which is, nevertheless, only the execution of a mere bodily movement and not a matter of human action. But, this, as I have been at pains to point out, is a mistake. It is of course true that, in special circumstances like these, a mere bodily movement or a physiological happening does take place; but it is not the only thing that happens. I also perform an action which brings this movement about -- I raise my arm! So, special cases cannot be regarded as being on a par with cases in which what takes place is the execution of a mere bodily movement and nothing else. It would be much less misleading to view special cases as episodes in which a person sodes something immediately, i.e., performs a simple action, which in turn causes another and distinct movement in his body to occur. Here at least two separate events take place, not just one as Macklin seems to suppose.

In short, if I am right about this, there is, on Melden's analysis, nothing that one does directly that is not an action. And, even in special circumstances, expressions like 'causing one's arm to rise' are quite properly considered as descriptions of an action performed by an agent. Melden's position on this aspect of the problem is perhaps best summed up when he says that, "In raising my arm I am performing an action .... But the elevation of the arm -- the rising of the arm -- is one thing, the doing or the action of raising the arm is something else again".[18]

At this stage of the discussion I would like to underscore the fact that I have not been arguing that Melden's analysis is correct, or even that it is clear. Rather it has merely been my contention that the issue which gives rise to the confusion pointed out by Macklin is quite different than the one she has identified. On my view, the lack of clarity surrounding, and the resulting difficulty in making sense of, this portion of his account derives primarily from Melden's employment of the concept of a bodily movement. To be more precise, since *prime facie* at least, there appear to be only two distinct categories of event under consideration, namely, "bodily (or physical) actions" and "physiological" or "bodily happenings", the problem here is primarily one of determining where in the overall scheme of things the notion of a bodily movement is to be located.

Fortunately, we have now arrived at a point in the investigation where we can begin to try to fit bodily movements into the conceptual puzzle with which we have been dealing. What then, on Melden's way of

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[18] Melden, op. cit., p. 66.

looking at these matters, is the nature of the relationship, on the one hand, between bodily (or physiological) happenings and bodily movements, and, on the other, between bodily movements and the things persons do? Although Melden's comments on this subject are often difficult to pin down, there are a number of occasions on which he does say things that provide some insight into the way in which he might answer these questions. Hence, by piecing some of his more revealing observations together with what we have learned about his position thus far, I shall try to forge from this what I take to be the most plausible rendering of his views on this crucial issue.

To begin with, it will be recalled from our discussion of what happened when the connoisseur made his bid on the painting that a given event can be described in many different ways. In making this point in reference to signalling, Melden makes a remarks that affords some significant clues about the sort of answer he would give to our question. In this connection, he says:

> ... it is true that when, in normal circumstances, my arm rises as I signal, the rising of the arm *is* also describable as my action of raising my arm. What we can say, therefore, is that the movement of the muscles causes the bodily happening which is in some sense *involved in* the action of raising the arm.[19]

Now if we interpret this claim in the light of what has recently been said, it would seem reasonable to conclude that Melden's misleading talk about "a bodily movement that is correctly describable as something done by the agent" can be understood as implying that bodily happenings, or, alternatively and equivalently, bodily movements are events which in the appropriate circumstances can also be considered as actions performed

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[19] Ibid., p. 73.

by a human agent. Consequently, so far as this part of the puzzle is concerned, it appears that a more plausible reading of Melden's position is as holding that some bodily movements or happenings may be characterized as things persons do, while certain others may not. Additional support for this interpretation can be found in his claim that:

> When I perform an action, there is some bodily movement that occurs, but not every bodily movement counts as an action ....[20]

And, again, the same point is implicit in his assertion that:

> There is a difference between my arm rising and my raising my arm, between my muscles moving and my moving my muscles -- in short, between a bodily movement or happening and an action.[21]

Thus, it seems pretty clear that for Melden bodily movements are of two sorts; on the one hand, there are those which one "in some sense involved in" human actions and, on the other, there are those which amount to mere bodily or physiological happenings and nothing more. Moreover, it must also be stressed that when the issue is set out in these terms, the supposed further distinction between bodily or physiological happenings and bodily movements collapses. In other words, Melden for his purposes seems quite content to treat physiological happenings and those bodily movements which are not in some sense involved in actions as being on a par with each other. By this I mean simply that he seems prepared to consign bodily movements, like the rising of an arm, and physiological occurrences, such as a movement of a muscle, to the domain of happenings, and to contrast both

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[20]Melden, 'Action,' p. 58.

[21]Melden, 'Willing,' Philosophical Review, Vol. 69 (1960), p. 475.

sharply with the things one does or with human actions.

Now that we have succeeded in clarifying the nature and scope of the problem which occupies Melden throughout the first part of his argument in *Free Action*, we can begin to focus our attention more directly on the heart of the matter. Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that the excursion on which we embarked in an effort to reach this end has been valuable for at least two additional reasons. In the first place, it has helped to furnish a background against which we may strive to gain a better understanding of the views Melden goes on to develop in the second phase of his argument. And, secondly, it has drawn attention to some of the hidden complexities and subtleties involved in our ordinary talk about the events which comprise the history of persons. In the past, many of those who have concerned themselves in one way or another with the study of human behaviour have taken them for granted and, as a result, have ridden roughshod over them, presumably on the assumption that little could be learned through subjecting this kind of talk to serious and careful scrutiny. However, Melden's analysis serves to kindle very important doubts concerning any account of human behaviour which purports to ignore these matters entirely. At any rate, the principal task that lies before us is one of determining how and on what basis human actions are to be distinguished from bodily movements of the sort that are *not* "in some sense involved in" the doings of persons. And, as a first step we need to discover what is involved in Melden's view of this distinction.

In rejecting the thesis that, in cases of actions, doings --

either mental or physiological -- stand to bodily movements as cause to effect, Melden is attacking a theory, or, better, a species of theory, which seeks to furnish one sort of answer to this question. And it seems to me that Melden is quite right in suggesting that these proposals do embody serious confusions. For to say that an action is a bodily movement, say the rising of the arm, which has as its cause some other doing in which the agent has antecedently engaged, is of no help whatsoever, by reason of the fact that the notion of action (or doing) is already presupposed in the analysis. In other words, such a proposal merely amounts to the claim that an action is a bodily movement plus an action. And any attempt to analyze 'action' along these lines is clearly circular. Furthermore, if, for the moment at least, we assume with Melden that there is a gap between doing and physiological happening we should be unable to make sense of a physiologically induced doing, since on this view this kind of talk is logically incoherent. In short, this version of the doing -- causes -- happening theory of action is untendable precisely because of its inability to provide a coherent account of actions. At the same time, however, it must also be emphasized that, while these arguments do show these particular attempts to analyze 'action' to be unsatisfactory, they are not sufficient to rule out any attempt to explain the difference between actions and physiological happenings in terms of causes. In other words, further arguments are required if it is to be maintained that it is, in principle, impossible to separate the things one does from the things that happen to one by appeal to the kind of causes involved in bringing about events of each type.

In concluding the discussion of this phase of Melden's account, a number of further points need to be made. To begin with, if we are to become clearer about what is involved in his distinction between matters of human action and matters of physiological happening, we need to become clearer about what he has in mind when he speaks of the existence of a logical gulf between actions and happenings. Now, as we noticed earlier, he seems to want to maintain that, just as in moral philosophy there is said to be a gap between 'Is' and 'Ought', in the sense that talk about what *is* the case neither entails nor is entailed by talk about what *ought* to be the case, so too in the theory of action there is a similar gulf between physiological happenings and human doings. Obviously if Melden is right about this, then we must treat actions and physiological happenings as belonging to fundamentally different categories. And, as a result, any attempt to explicate action by appeal to physiological happenings or vice-versa would involve a fallacy. But here an important difficulty arises. Because, from what he has to say about this distinction, it is not at all clear as to what Melden's gulf is a gulf between. That is, he sometimes talks as if there are fundamental differences between the kind of language we employ in describing and explaining actions and the kind we use in speaking about physiological happenings. According to this view, in other words, we use one set of concepts in talking about the things that persons do and another, radically different, set to talk about what happens to them. Yet, on other occasions, he seems to adopt the position that the distinction has less to do with the language we employ to refer to events than it does with the events to which the

language refers. From this perspective, the gap between actions and happening is to be chalked up to the fact that actions and happenings are events with radically different properties. And, on still other occasions, he seems to want to put the two views together and maintain that because there is a gulf between the language of action and the language of physiology there must be a corresponding gulf between actions and physiological happenings. Hence, from what has been said thus far, it seems that at the very least Melden's stand on these matters is ambiguous, and at worst, it contains a serious fallacy. In short, this kind of ambiguity is a matter that must be borne in mind as our examination of Melden's position proceeds.

A second point that must likewise be kept in mind for future reference has to do with Melden's apparently uncritical assimilation of the things persons do with their actions. For this, too, may lead to serious confusions or difficulties of other kinds. Now, it will be recalled that Melden began this part of his investigation by treating as paradigm cases of human action circumstances in which a person may be said to do X by doing Y, where 'X' and 'Y' are non-synonymous descriptive expressions. Clearly it has to be acknowledged that his analysis, which appears to equate doing and action, proceeds smoothly enough so long as we confine our attention to cases like those in which one signals a turn by raising an arm, or makes a bid on a painting by nodding one's head. Yet, the moment we depart from examples of this type we begin to encounter difficulties. We saw, for example, that the case of the movie goer who moves certain muscles in his leg by moving his arm must be treated as an extraordinary or special case. And the reason why episodes of this species must be accorded such status

within this particular framework is now clearer. It is simply that, although the descriptions 'Smith moved his (quiescent) legs by raising his arm' and 'Mr. C. bid on the Van Gogh by nodding his head' can be cast in the form of person P does X by doing Y, it is quite plain that the expressions describe or refer to episodes of very different sorts. That is, the expressions which may be substituted for X in the formula can be seen to play very different roles in each description. In the latter case, it seems sensible to suppose that what 'Mr. C. made a bid on the Van Gogh' describes or refers to may be regarded both as something he does and an action of his. On the other hand, 'Smith moves his leg' or 'Smith causes the movement of his (dormant) leg' seems to pick out an event which, while it may, without doing serious violence to the language, be characterized a something he does, surely cannot be regarded as an action of his. If this is so, then there seems to be some sort of gap between the things persons do and their actions.

Melden seems to recognize that there is a problem here and attempts to overcome it not only claiming that cases like these are "special", but also by hinting at what appears to be a distinction between simple and complex doings or, perhaps, actions.[22]

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[22] In Free Action, p. 66 ff. Melden speaks of actions such as raising one's arm as the exercise of a primitive ability. Presumably, at least on one interpretation of this sort of talk, the exercise of a primitive ability can be said to issue in a primitive (or, perhaps, "simple?") action. At the same time, he seems to want to contrast these abilities and their exercises with abilities and performances which in some way depend on the primitive, for example, opening a locked door. The latter might very well be regarded as derivative (or perhaps, "complex?") abilities and actions -- at least on one reading of these and associated remarks.

But these moves are at best cosmetic. They serve, temporally, to hide and thus to postpone consideration of the underlying issues.

One such difficulty stems from Melden's reliance on the model of someone's doing X by doing Y in analyzing episodes in which it seems plausible to suppose that someone has performed an action. The difficulty here is that it is not at all clear what is to count as something done by a person. Consider the following examples: 'I wake up', 'I yawn', 'The light was turned on by me', 'I cough', 'Some water is swallowed by me', 'I shiver', 'I fall asleep'. Can these be treated as descriptions of things I do? And, furthermore, how are we to decide in each particular case? What emerges from considerations such as these is a recognition of the fact that the concept of a doing is an extremely slippery notion. As a result, unless and until we are a good deal clearer about what is to count as a doing, as something a person may properly be said to do, we must regard Melden's strategy for analyzing certain episodes involving actions, viz., as instances of *doing* X by *doing* Y, as very dubious indeed. For not only do these sorts of difficulties break out when we try to decide whether the movement of a quiescent limb, when this is brought about by an action, is something one does but they also come to the fore when we confront the somewhat different situations in which a person may be characterized as 'Closing the door by moving his arm' or 'Replacing a lightbulb by climbing a ladder'. My point is that, once we begin to explore various possible candidates which satisfy the requirement that they are descriptions of circumstances in which a person may be said to do X by doing Y, it very quickly becomes apparent that the special cases are at

least as typical as the ordinary or standard ones. And, this state of affairs, I have been suggesting, is simply a reflection of the ambiguity that surrounds Melden's use of the concept of a doing.

And the third and most important issue that we need to keep before us as we prepare to examine the second phase of Melden's inquiry is the question of how he proposes to distinguish between matters of human action and matters of bodily or physiological happening. Since many of the things he has had to say thus far are preliminaries in the sense that they are meant merely to raise the problem of action, and since, furthermore, he has already ruled out a number of approaches that might be taken in order to distinguish between these two forms of behaviour, we must now begin to inquire into the sorts of grounds that he himself deems appropriate for distinguishing between bodily movements that are "in some sense involved in" human actions and bodily movements that are not.

In a comment that summarizes, and partly clarifies, some of his earlier claims, Melden points out that:

> ... although the bodily happening needs to be distinguished from the action of raising the arm, the former, in appropriate circumstances, is the very same event as the latter. So, too, while 'raising the arm' and 'signalling' are different descriptions, a case of the former does not produce, but in the appropriate circumstances is the very same thing as, a case of the latter.[23]

Consequently the fact that a particular occurrence can be characterized, on the one hand, as a bodily movement such as the nodding of one's hand, or, on the other, as the action of nodding one's head, or perhaps making an offer on a painting, seems, therefore, quite unrelated to the

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[23] Ibid., p. 74.

intrinsic features of the behaviour itself; rather how what occurs is to be described is dependent upon the circumstances in which the event takes place. Thus, the distinction between matters of human action and matters of "mere" bodily movement has in some way to do the context in which the behaviour occurs.

The stage has now been reached where we come, as it were, face to face with the view propounded by Melden and others that the context is of paramount importance in giving an adequate account of human action. Thus, with certain of these preliminary considerations behind us, we are now in a better position to turn our attention to the examination of contextual accounts of actions themselves.

CHAPTER III

ACTIONS AND RULES

In Chapter II a major portion of the discussion was devoted to sorting out various issues associated with Melden's proposed distinction between the things one can be said to do and the things that happen to one; since clarity on this matter is essential if one is to attempt to provide an answer to the principal question of this inquiry; namely, 'What is an action?' or, alternatively, 'How are actions to be distinguished from other species of human behaviour?'. In this connection, it was maintained that the problem of action might plausibly be resolved into the problem of marking off certain human events describable as 'actions' from certain other events describable as 'bodily movements'. The stage has now been reached where, on being somewhat clearer about the purport of the separation, we must begin to inquire into and examine its basis. The position taken by Melden is that the circumstances or context are of very considerable importance in distinguishing between my raising my arm and my arms' rising. Owing to the central role it assigns to the notion of circumstances or context, this account of human action has been coined "the contextual theory of action". At this stage what must be determined, if we are to assess the merits of this proposal, as an answer to our fundamental question, is the part played by the context in distinguishing the two kinds of human event under consideration. This the will be the focal point of

our inquiry into the contextual theory in this chapter. But first, in order to prepare the way for this discussion, I propose to explore two related matters. To begin with, I want to consider two additional arguments Melden has employed in trying to show that theories which seek to account for the difference between actions and bodily movements by appeal to the kinds of events that bring them about are radically mistaken. This will prepare us to better understand why Melden thinks that an understanding of context is critical to an understanding of human action. Secondly, I want to take a moment to consider a broader range of actions than has been considered up until now. So far the tendency has been to focus on actions that conform to fairly restricted model and to ignore a wider cross-section of examples. This brief excursion, as will become clear later, will turn out to be very instructive when the time comes to assess the merits of the contextualists' proposal.

A number of theories treating of the action/bodily movement distinction, most notably those with Cartesian or Neo-Cartesian learnings, take the position that the difference between actions and bodily movements consists in the fact that the former, unlike the latter, are preceded and caused by a mental event such as a desire, motive, or a reason.[1] For example, on this view my raising my leg and

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[1] These views are to be distinguished sharply from those discussed in Chapter II. In that context, it will be recalled, the theories criticized by Melden were theories to the effect that, in the case of actions, something the agent does, i.e., performing an act of will, causes the bodily movement. In these circumstances, by contrast, there is no implication that a desire, motive, or what not, is something the agent does.

my leg's rising differ only in that the raising of the leg is the result of a mental cause, in this instance perhaps a desire to raise my leg; whereas, the bodily movement described as 'the rising of the leg' is neither brought about nor preceeded by any such occurrence. To put it another way, bodily movements are caused by bodily or physical goings on, while actions are the causal consequence of some mental event or other. In other words, according to this analysis, an action is simply a bodily movement plus a mental event, e.g., a desire, intention, motive or a reason. In this way, desires, and so on, are construed as mental causes, that is to say, as factors which in the case of an action mechanically bring about or produce certain bodily movements.

Against this type of account, Melden argues that any such attempt to distinguish actions from mere bodily movements is fundamentally mistaken. He attacks this doctrine by arguing that my action of raising my leg cannot be the causal consequence of some antecedent mental occurrence described as 'the desire to raise my leg' because the connection between my desire and my action is conceptual or logical. If, in contrast, we were to assume that desires, motives and the like, are genuine causes of bodily events, then we must be prepared to allow that the relationship between desire and action can be nothing more than a contingent one. However, Melden maintains that the relationship between concepts of desire, motive etc., and the concept of action is not contingent. That is to say, the concepts of desire and motive cannot be understood except as the desire or motive

for some action.[2] Consequently, Melden seems to suggest that, while desires, motives -- and perhaps more generally 'reasons' -- are typically invoked to explain actions, we cannot account for the difference between actions and bodily movements by maintaining that, whereas bodily movements are brought about by physiological happenings, actions are brought about by desires, motives, reasons or what not. He insists that attempts to draw the distinction along these lines are wrong-headed for the simple reason that they mistakenly assume that reasons are causally, and hence contingently, connected to the actions they are called upon to explain.

Here once again it is worth noting that the force of this particular argument, which has been dubbed "the logical connection argument", is by no means clear. From what has been said thus far, it seems evident that Melden is inclined to regard it as a general indictment of any and all theories which hold that actions can be caused. But, as we saw in the preceding chapter, it seems wrong to suppose that from the fact that there may be a conceptual or logical connection between the description of an action and the description of a reason invoked in explaining it, we can draw any conclusions about the sorts of relations that obtain between the events or states of affairs, if any, to which such descriptions refer.

This brings me to Melden's second argument, which might appropriately be characterized as "the two languages" or "two language-

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[2] A.I. Melden, Free Action (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 83.

games argument". In this context, Melden seems to be out to undermine any attempt to reduce talk about actions, especially explanatory talk involving such notions as desire, motive or reason, to talk about physiology. More particularly, he wants to deny the thesis that the language we use to explain human actions can be reduced to, or analyzed in terms of, the language employed by the physiologist, including talk about muscular movements, neuron-firings, and various other sorts of physiochemical changes taking place within the organism and, above all, about cause and effect. Melden suggests that the reductionists' programme is nothing more than a misbegotten pipe-dream, because there is a gap between the language of action and the language of physiology, akin to the gulf in moral philosophy between 'Is' and 'Ought', which rules out the possibility of any such reduction. To say that there is a gap between actions and mere bodily happenings is, on his account, to say that our talk about human action and the language of the physiologist are of two distinct sorts, each employing an exclusive set of concepts with their own peculiar logical characteristics.[3] Thus, the introduction of the notions of cause and effect in an effort to account for the distinctiveness of actions misses the mark altogether since, by hypothesis, these and related concepts belong to a body of discourse radically different from the one having to do with actions. The purpose of the former is simply to explain

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[3] Much the same view regarding 'human society' is advanced by Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 72, when he says, " ... the notion of human society involves a scheme of concepts logically incompatible with the kinds of explanation offered in natural science".

various changes and happenings in or to the organism -- not human actions. In order to explain a bodily movement, such as the rising of the leg, one does not seek out the desire or motive for this occurrence, the reason being that happenings of this kind are wholly explicable in the language of physiology, in particular, in terms of causal laws relating the event to be explained with an antecedent event, for instance, the knees being sharply struck by a blunt instrument. On the other hand, if what we wish to explain is someone's action of crossing their legs while seated in a theatre then what we are seeking is his motive in acting -- perhaps he wanted to assume a more restful position. But, Melden contends, in seeking a motive or reason for the action we are not seeking its cause. Consequently, he thinks that in explaining a matter of human action we employ an entirely different conceptual scheme than the one we use in accounting for some series of bodily movements.[4] In short, on Melden's view, there are two irreducibly different kinds of explanation; one appropriate to human conduct, the other having to do with physiological changes and occurrences within the body.

On Melden's analysis, to inquire why it is that a certain student spends much of his time reading Russian novels, is not to ask for an explanation in a language descriptive of interior bodily events or goings on, be they mental or physiological. A complete account of his conduct can be given only by appealing to what he terms "our familiar discourse about actions and agent".[5] We may discover,

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[4] Melden, op. cit., p. 184.

[5] Ibid., p. 175.

in this case, that the person is doing a course in Russian Literature and aims to do well in it, or that he enjoys reading good books. Here the action, or actions, of the student have been explained in the sense that one is made aware of his motive or reason for doing what he does. For this reason Melden suggests that, rather than searching for internal events which give rise to bodily movements in order to account for things people do, we should turn our attention to the investigation of the roles played by terms including "desire", "intention", "reason" and so on, in our ordinary talk about persons and their actions.

One can agree with Melden on the point that there do seem to be different ways of talking about on the one hand things that persons do and on the other the changes taking place within their bodies. Nevertheless, it must also be emphasized that our ability to separate these two species of discourse is parasitic upon our ability to distinguish actions and bodily movements; that is to say, our ability to spell out what is to count as an action and what is to be considered as a bodily movement. The point I am making here has to do with the lack of clarity surrounding Melden's attempt to distinguish actions and bodily movements. Part of the difficulty, as I indicated in Chapter II, is that it is often very hard to tell whether Melden is arguing for a distinction between kinds of language or between types of events. Yet, in this context matters are complicated even further. For it is evident that in arguing that actions cannot be caused by mental events, such as reasons, or by physiological events, including muscle movements, Melden has turned his attention away from the issue

of 'What is an action?', and has, instead, begun to dwell on the question 'How is an action to be explained?'. And, in so doing, he has further muddied the waters, by seeming to conflate questions about the explanation of action with questions about its description or identification. Now in the language of the natural and/or biological sciences one can distinguish statements describing an event from those which serve to explain why it occurred. Furthermore, within the context of scientific inquiry, description is an activity logically prior to explanation, since one must be clear about *what* has taken place in order to account for *why* it has occurred. And, as we noted in Chapter I, unless and until we can say what is to count as an action, any attempt to explain actions or to analyze how it is they are to be explained is at best premature and at worse faces the pssibility of being quite hopelessly confused simply because the cart has been put before the horse. Surely there is no reason to suppose that this difficulty is in any way eliminated or diminished merely because of the fact that we are inquiring into our everyday talk about human affairs rather than technical, scientific discourse.

The second matter I want to raise before beginning an examination of Melden's account of the role of context in human action has to do with the rather limited range of examples considered thus far. Let us, at this stage, consider something of the range of happenings we normally have in mind when we talk about actions, since before now we seem to have been mainly concerned with arm raisings and leg liftings. The cause for my concern here is quite simply the recognition that if we become overly preoccupied with examples of one sort,

we run the very real risk of coming to the conclusion that our findings have much wider application than they in fact do. Indeed, as I shall argue a little later, this seems to be one of the main weaknesses in the contextualists' attempt to give an account of actions.

Human behaviour, just as the language we employ in talking about it, is, it is becoming increasigly clear, very complex and diverse. The notion applies to events falling along a very broad spectrum. On the one side, we encounter what seem to be clear-cut cases of actions, such as a philosophy professors giving a lecture on *Dasein's* everydayness, or a surgeons performing a heart transplant operation, and so on. On the other, there appear to be equally as sharply defined instances of mere bodily movements or physiological happenings, including the various processes associated with the digestion of food, the circulation of the blood, and reflex movements. And falling between the two extremes is a vast middle-ground -- a conceptual no man's land, as it were -- where the borderline between actions and bodily movements is extraordinarily difficult to discern. In this realm, one is likely to come upon, irrespective of the view one might choose to consider, such goings on as the behaviour of persons in a hypnotic state, of those coming out of narcosis, of those half asleep (and half awake), of sleepwalkers and so on. Furthermore, there are those who are of the opinion that the behaviour of infants and of persons variously described as "beserk lunatics", "the insane" or "madmen" should likewise fall within this domain. And, still others,

apparently following Aristotle,[6] have included the actions of the coerced, the duped, the ignorant, etc., among those sorts of behaviour which seem to be neither clear-cut cases of actions nor simply just bodily movements. In other words, the sorts of behaviour that will be counted as actions depend in important ways upon the particular purposes of the inquiry. For example, some are primarily concerned with describing and explaining human behaviour, others appear more concerned with establishing criteria in virtue of which a person's behaviour can be evaluated as 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'praiseworthy' or 'blameworthy', etc., and not infrequently, one comes upon still others interested in pursuing an end involving a blend of the first two purposes.

My point here, then, is that a very broad spectrum of human events fall between clear-cut cases of actions on the one hand and uncontroversial instances of bodily happenings, on the other. Furthermore, different writers classify many of the "in between cases" quite differently depending on their assumptions about paradigm or typical cases of human action and agency, and on whatever further purposes they may have for investigating human action. These matters need to be borne in mind when we examine the contextualists theory of action with a view to determining its adequacy as answer to the question of 'What is the difference between actions and other kinds of human behaviour?' -- a task to which I now turn.

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[6] Aristotle's distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions, made for the purposes of assigning responsibility, seems to have the effect of consigning involuntary actions to this middle-ground.

The paradigms of agency and action chosen by the contextualist writers under consideration, i.e., Melden, Peters and Winch, are very much alike inspite of the fact that their respective purposes in dealing with this topic can be seen to differ rather significantly. Melden, for example, examines human action with a view to elucidating the notions of freedom and moral responsibility. He sees man as an essentially moral and social being guided in what he does by moral and social considerations (or rules) in his relationships with others.[7] The epithet "Man in society is like a chess-player writ large" encapsulates Peters' conception of man. Inasmuch as his paramount concern rests with the explanation of human behaviour, the analogy of the chess-player serves to bring out Peters' belief that man is a rational, rule-following animal and, in consequence, that his actions are directed and can be explained by reference to the "rules of the game".[8] Rules are, likewise, central to Winch's concept of man as it is developed in his discussion of meaningful behaviour. Human beings are, from this point of view, distinctively social (and perhaps political) creatures who, in the uniquely human things they do, can be said to be governed by norms or rules.[9] Winch goes on to argue further that, if man is indeed a rule-following animal, then the study of human society, including the actions and interactions of men,

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[7] Melden, op. cit., p. 179.

[8] R.S. Peters, The Concept of Motivation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 4-14.

[9] Winch, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

is properly speaking a philosophical and not, as many suppose, a scientific endeavour. Science is concerned with nature and matters of fact. Philosophy, by contrast, deals with questions concerning convention and matters of value. Therefore, rules and norms are appropriately within its realm of inquiry. And, because meaningful human behaviour is intimately connected with norms and standards, the province in which it is appropriately investigated is that of philosophy rather than of science.

The models of man which underpin these theories, imply that since human beings are characteristically moral, rational or social beings (or some unspecified combination of these) their actions are guided by standards of ethical goodness or rightness, of reason, or of the social order, respectively. On Melden's view, " ... to understand the concept of a human action we need to understand the *possibilities* of descriptions in social and moral terms ...".[10] Human agents in their dealings with one another are, generally speaking, guided by many sorts of ethical and social conventions whereby they take each other into account, either directly or indirectly, in doing whatever they do. Consequently, Melden, along with Peters and Winch, goes on to maintain that it should be possible to describe and/or explain what the agent does, when he performs an action, as "applying criteria", "conforming to standards", "following rules", or "observing principles", and so on. Action, from this point of view, is to be regarded as a characteristically social concept intimately connected with the notion of rules. Moreover, owing to the prescriptive nature of the

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[10] Melden, op. cit., p. 180.

rules or standards in question, one may evaluate what is being done as 'correct' or 'incorrect', 'right' or 'wrong'.[11]

Consider, for example, the case of a motorist who signals a left turn. Let us assume he does this by raising his arm, perhaps he signals in this way because his electrical signals are at the moment in a state of disrepair. Now someone unacquainted with the conventions of motoring might observe that a man seated on the left-hand side of an automobile raises his arm and extends it parallel to the roadway. Another person familiar with the appropriate regulations, say a fellow motorist, might recognize that *the driver* was *signalling a left turn* and would himself be prepared to act accordingly. In other words, when an agent performs an action such as, for example, cheating on his income tax, making a bid on a painting, signalling a left turn, and so on, the description of what has taken place involves an implicit reference to some set of conventions or rules, i.e., to legal statutes, conventions related to auctions, the rules of the road, etc. The driver in obeying the traffic rules thereby takes other motorists into account by indicating to them that he is about to proceed across the street and into the nearby parking lot. In consequence of the apparent concern shown by the driver for his fellow motorists, one can describe what he does as having moral and/or social significance. Furthermore, signalling, as an action executed within a setting governed by rules and standards, can be done "properly", in this particular case "safely", or "improperly", for example, by raising one's arm when one's automobile is well beyond the point at

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[11] Winch, op. cit., p. 32.

which regulations prescribe that the signal ought to be given. In this way, the context of rules not only enables one to describe what is being done, they, in addition, afford a standard by reference to which the action may be appraised as a "good" one or a "bad" one, dependent upon how nearly it conforms to or departs from what has been established as "appropriate" or "correct".

Clearly there is no denying the claim that a great many of the things persons do in their day-to-day dealings with others are conventional, that they involve some attention to procedures and regulations in very complex and subtle ways. Nevertheless, I would want to resist the further claim made particularly by Peters, and sometimes implied by Melden and Winch, that *all* human actions can be described and evaluated in terms of such rules. Peters, in discussing the case of a married man who suddenly makes an advance to a choirboy, remarks that it appears as if something were happening to the man.[12] That is to say, while he is prepared to acknowledge that making the pass at the choirboy is something the man may be said to do, he is reluctant to describe a doing of this type as an action. On his analysis, in order for some item of behaviour to count as an action it must conform to certain criteria, one of which is that the behaviour must be socially appropriate. The suggestion here, then, is that when the conduct of a person departs from the norm it is not *prima facie* to be regarded as an action. On these grounds, one might also have similar doubts in reference to someone's failure to attend Sunday Mass regularly, getting a divorce or cheating on an examination: Are these

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[12] Peters, op. cit., p. 10.

to be considered things a man does -- his actions, or things which merely happen to a person? It seems obvious that in many instances the things that people do can quite legitimately be characterized as 'breaking the rules', 'being in violation of the regulations', 'deviating from the norm' and so on, without such a description carrying with it the further implication that what is being so described is not an action. On this matter, I would support the thesis of Melden and Winch that 'breaking a rule' makes sense only in reference to the notion of following a rule; that is to say, one may only describe what the agent is doing as breaking a rule if it would be possible that such doings are sometimes cases of following a rule. Peters' position, by contrast, would seem to imply that a person who does something at odds with prevailing norms and standards relating to appropriate conduct (in this case those pertaining to heterosexual conduct) is not just behaving in an unconventional manner; rather the things he does cannot be characterized as his actions at all. It seems that we are to regard such persons as driven by irresistable forces to engage in socially inappropriate forms of behaviour. Such a view provides us with a caricature of a man who, reminiscent of Tolstoy's Ivan Illyich, is singularly preoccupied with propriety and routine in everything he does. In other words, this account seems to treat as mere happenings certain forms of behaviour which, on pre-analytic grounds we should normally be prepared to regard as actions.

In addition to there being actions describable as 'conformities to the rule' and 'departures from the rule', there are some other sorts of actions most appropriately characterized as 'the creating of

new rules or conventions'. These activities involve developing new ways of doing things. To put it another way, there are some instances of human conduct which cannot be treated simply as cases of the agent's conforming to or deviating from the norm. Under the aegis of creation or invention, one might expect to encounter such examples as; an artist who in acting comes up with an unprecedented style of painting, an inventor who fashions a new mode of transportation, a philosopher who conceives a novel set of assumptions regarding human nature, an educator who brings forth an original method of teaching youngsters how to read maps, etc. It is not enough, in each case, to say that the agent has merely elected to pursue a new and different set of rules, but that his action is still governed or guided by rules for all that.[13] If actions of a creative sort were indeed rule-governed then it would seem to follow that in order to come up with such innovations, all that one need do is consult an artist's manual on creativity or an inventor's handbook on "how to do it", master the appropriate rules, or meta-rules, and become as creative or inventive as one might desire. The trouble with this notion is that there just are no rules (written or unwritten) which either govern or guide what the agent does in creating new conventions or criteria. For this reason, it is a mistake to suppose that, in such instances, a person's behaviour is describable in terms of 'following rules' and 'obeying principles'. I am not here arguing the related point that, once criteria or rules have been articulated, subsequent actions,

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[13] This is the sort of argument employed by Winch, op. cit., pp. 52-53 in distinguishing the life styles of a monk and a free-thinking anarchist.

including those of the author, cannot be described by reference to them. My particular concern at this stage is with what Koestler has called "the act of creation" insofar as what occurs under such conditions is something done by the agent. There are those who may object, inspite of what has been said, that there are nevertheless rules involved in what the creative person does on such occasions. To this one might fairly reply that, while this claim is perhaps true, it is as illuminating in regard to the relevant behaviour as are the statements 'he is keeping off the grass' and 'he is not in the company of his wife' when they are employed as "descriptions" of the actions of someone seated in his study filling out an income tax form. Such statements may be true, but their connection with what in fact the agent is doing must remain unclear until one is able to determine what his action is, in which case they might fill out the picture by filling in incidental details for the sake of "colour".

It seems to me that there is yet one further class of actions which, in addition to creative actions on the part of an agent, resist any description in terms of rules or standards, simply because they are the sort of doing to which no rules apply. An example of such a doing might be someone's raising their arm in order to adjust their spectacles, or perhaps I might, while seated at my desk, lean back in the chair and look out the window. It is not as though one does this sort of thing "as a rule" every hour on the half hour in taking a break. Nor need it be the case that one performs this action 'whenever one feels like it', which might be construed as a rule of sorts. It is just that these and very many other actions

performed by human beings are done independently of attention to any rules whatever — at least rules of the sort presently under consideration. The same points can be made in reference to the actions of an agent alone in his study as he lights his pipe, picks up his pen and begins to write. Now, while it may be said of some of these actions that they involve rules either directly or indirectly, the rules in question are very unlikely to be of the sort that would enable one to evaluate the agent's conduct itself. The reason being that lighting one's pipe and picking up one's pen are not generally speaking morally or socially significant actions in this context. Indeed, it is hard to see what role rules could be said to play in such cases without thereby stretching the concept of a rule beyond reason. On the other hand, certain consequences of the agent's writing, such as for instance the publication and distribution of his treatise advocating violent civil disobedience, might very well come up for scrutiny on both moral and social grounds. But, then, is not his actions *per se* which are subject to appraisal in terms of public criteria and standards; rather it is the outcome or product of his actions; namely, his essay which, by virtue of its being placed in the hands of other persons, has entered the moral and social arena.

There are, to be sure, numerous things done by human beings the correct description of which does involve either explicit or implicit mention of moral, social, and other conventions. On the one hand, there are actions such as keeping a promise by returning a set of notes to a friend, purchasing a textbook, waiting for a professor who is late in arriving for a lecture, writing a history paper, and so on.

And, on the other, there are activities of a more general nature including helping or hindering one's fellows, running for public office, driving one's automobile, doing one's job, paying one's debts, etc.. The genesis of the principles and standards which in various ways govern and guide human actions of these sorts is to be found in the arena of human interaction or social intercourse among agents. It is for this reason that the analogy of a game (or alternatively of a "common form of life" used by Wittgenstein to throw light upon the nature of language), where the moves of the players and pieces are set down by rules, seems a particularly apt way of viewing those sorts of conduct which take place in the social arena, and in contact with other individuals.

By contrast, the notions of games, moves, and following or obeying rules, as they are employed by the three writers currently being discussed -- to give an account of what is distinctive about human actions, are being called upon to perform task for which, I would maintain, they are improperly suited. Claims to the effect that 'Man in society is like a chess-player writ large' or that 'human actions are really very much like moves in a game' are metaphorical in character. The value of the metaphor is that it suggests that certain sorts of human action, namely those involving intercourse among agents, are analogous in certain respects to a game where moves are made, rules are followed and, in general, persons participate in a common form of life. Wittgenstein exploited this analogy in a most enlightening and useful way in his talk about language-games suggesting, thereby, that language is a form of life. However, the

suitability of the analogy of a game when applied to language is due to the fact that using a language, either in speaking or writing, is in large measure a public and interpersonal activity. Consequently, the epithets belonging to discourse about games are sometimes helpful and genuinely illuminating ways of characterizing the conduct exhibited by persons in their relations with one another. Nevertheless, the attempt to extend the metaphor so as to encompass everything that persons do, including actions involving no traffic with others, fails precisely because it stretches the analogy beyond the confines of human interaction to which it is most germane. In short, to say that some human actions may be likened to moves in a game is not to identify a conceptual characteristic of 'action', rather it is to suggest that a helpful way of understanding a certain range of human activities, namely, social activities, is by treating them *as if* they were games.

Nevertheless, even if we were to restrict the application of the notions of following a rule and playing a game exclusively to the arena of social intercourse among people, that is to say, to those sorts of action involving traffic with others, it is not at all clear that conduct of this species is necessarily game-like. By treating this variety of human doings as though they were, on every occasion, governed by rules one is apt to minimize or oversimplify differences in desires, motives, needs, tastes and so on, that are intimately connected with the things persons do in their dealings with others. In other words, these transactions would all be lumped together into one category and thereby glossed over as being merely "conventional".

I would suspect that talk about public standards and mutually understood rules which enter into and direct human relationships is in large measure talk about a philosophers' illusion. The understanding of others to be gained by recognizing the appropriate convention is at best superficial and is likely to provide us with very little insight into what the agent takes himself to be doing.

In short, it seems clear that the contextualists, in attempting to give an account of human action, have seized upon a model that has shown itself to be particularly informative in analyzing activities involving the use of language. They have transplanted this model in a much wider context and have gone on to try to maintain that all human actions are like moves in a game, and that, as a result, they can be best understood *as if* they were cases of following rules, obeying principles and so on. Against this thesis, I have been maintaining that, if the analogy of a game is applicable to any actions at all, it is suitable only for shedding light upon those doings in which one person associates with another. Nevertheless, even in these cases it is far from obvious that the games analogy can be informatively employed to analyze each and every instance of human interaction. Thus I would want to say, for reasons I shall discuss in more detail later, that principles, norms and rules cannot be regarded as definitive features of human interactions broadly understood. As a result, they can scarcely been seen as characteristic of the whole range of human actions. Or to put it another way, it may be true of some actions, including some of those involving contact with other agents, that they may be characterized as governed or guided by rules. But it is not

true of all actions or interactions. Thus, we might appropriately inquire at this point 'What sorts of actions are indeed governed by rules?' or alternatively 'In what sorts of context are principles and norms of primary importance in talk about matters of human action?'. One answer to this question might be that principles and rules are central if what is under examination are instances of moral or rational conduct. Similarly, in the framework of Melden and others, the reply would be that the notion of following a rule may be employed to characterize those actions which occur in those circumstances where a person's conduct is expected by all concerned to be moral or rational. In short, the notions of following a rule and obeying a principle are intrinsic to both the concepts of morality and rationality and not, as has been maintained by Melden, Peters, and Winch, to the concept of an action. Interestingly, Winch's account seems to carry matters a step further in suggesting that moral and rational conduct (i.e., rule-governed behaviour) must be considered as fundamental elements comprising any desirable political and social order. In any case, it would seem that what the contextualist has painted is a picture of what desirable conduct is like or showing us what is thought to be necessary in any worthwhile form of life; they do not, however, appear to consider human activities in their broader sense.

Thus I would maintain that the contextual theory of actions is an attempt at setting down one possible set of minimum standards in virtue of which actions may be said to be actions of a certain sort, e.g., 'moral', 'rational' and, perhaps, such that they contribute to the fostering and preserving of a commendable model of political and

social transactions among persons. To this end, the following of rules becomes a necessary constituent of certain forms of human activity. And, by the same token, other varieties of conduct, whereby one's fellow men are *not* taken into account by the agent when he acts, are to be deemed inappropriate and otherwise undesirable. In this way the context of mutually recognized rules is indeed important in talk about human actions. Nevertheless, this model cannot perform the principal task for which it has been appointed. The nature of this task, as it was originally seen by Melden is described as follows:

> ... just as in the case of the concept of a chess move, so in the case of the concept of any action the context of practices in which rules are obeyed, criteria employed, policies are observed -- a way of thinking and doing -- is essential to understanding the difference between ... bodily movements and actions.[14]

It appears that Professor Melden believes that it is only by reference to a context of norms, rules and principles that a distinction between actions and non-actions can be made. However, against this doctrine, I have argued that not all actions may be legitimately characterized as cases of following rules, rules which are determined by the circumstances in which the action is performed. Furthermore, on some

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[14] A.I. Melden, 'Action,' in D.F. Gustafson (ed.), Essays in Philosophical Psychology (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1964), p. 73. The thesis here is a stronger version of the one Melden defends in Free Action, p. 180, but as I have argued it is deficient on the same grounds as this earlier version. This position is substantially the same as that adopted by Winch, supra, in asserting that " ... all behaviour which is meaningful (therefore all specifically human behaviour) is ipso-facto rule-governed". According to this analysis meaningful behaviour is that which can be understood and thereby evaluated in terms of standards of correct conduct. Hence, here, the context is equally central to this account since the contedt is the origin of the conventions in question.

occasions a bodily movement may be treated as if it were a move in the game. A fit of sneezing, for instance, might cause me to drop my bishop on to the correct square, the one I had planned to position it on prior to my sudden attack. In other words, a mere happening may correspond to the rules of the game and the designs of the player without its, after all, being something one can be said to have done.

In other circumstances, norms and standards are applied to events or states of affairs that are merely things that happen to a person. When a man develops certain physical symptoms such as with the appearance of red spots on the skin accompanied by a bodily temperature of 102^{o} F, we may say that he has the measles and, moreover, that he is 'ill' or 'sick'. 'Being sick' and 'not being well', unlike 'having red spots on the arms and neck', are not just descriptions of the current bodily state of the person. In addition, they suggest a contrast with a state one ought to be in if one is to be characterized as 'enjoying good health'. Thus evaluative criteria deriving from prescriptive norms are not exclusively appropriate to human actions. They may be applied to bodily happenings as well.

But there are other and equally fundamental difficulties in this approach to distinguishing actions from other forms of human behaviour which serve to make it still more obvious that the rule-following analysis of action is untenable. To begin with, if this proposal is understood as an analysis of the concept of action then it seems viciously circular. That is, if to follow or obey a rule is to perform an action then to analyze action in terms of following rules is tantamount to asserting that to perform an action is to perform an

action. In other words, the notion of following or obeying a rule already presupposes the concept of action, and thus cannot be part of its analysis. This brings us to a second and more fundamental problem involved in these attempts to distinguish between actions and physiological happenings by appeal the notion of rule following. Apparently on the assumption that the concept of following or obeying a rule is unproblematic, Melden, Peters and Winch have made very little effort to explain what a rule is or what would be involved in someones following a rule. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly evident as our discussion has proceeded that this assumption is gratuitious, that the concepts of rules and of rule following are indeed problematic. For this reason, the contextualists' attempt to explicate what it is that is distinctive about those forms of human behaviour that count as actions tends to obscure a good deal more than it illuminate our understanding of the problem of action.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the contextualist theory of actions tends to make too much of the importance of rules and regulations in our accounting for human action. In particular, I have been arguing that the claim that, human actions are very much like moves in a game since, generally speaking, they are governed or guided by rules is a dramatic over-simplification. Nevertheless, on the basis of this assumption, Melden and the others have insisted that it is by reference to conventions and rules alone that the difference between an action and a bodily movement can be understood. Against this view, I have been maintaining that principles and norms may be properly employed only in the description of certain kinds of actions,

i.e., social interactions in which the conduct involved is moral, rational, or otherwise such that the agent in doing what he does is in fact 'playing a game' according to rules. In other words, not all species of human action involve attention to policies, procedures and regulations, and, for this reason, I would argue that the correct description of the person's performance under such circumstances need contain no reference, either direct or indirect, to any social or other convention. Rules, norms and standards, in short, are not common to all actions. And, I have also argued that far from being peculiar or unique to human behaviour that is action, norms and rules can be used in the description of mere physiological happenings.

Finally, it is worth noting that when Melden speaks of action as a social concept he seems to have two very different things in mind. Sometimes, he seems to mean that actions are the sorts of things that typically occur in the public area, a sphere in which human behaviour tends to be governed or guided by social conventions, standards and rules. On other occasions, however, he seems to suggest that action is social in a very different respect. And it is this, as yet unexamined, view that I plan to consider in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

ACTION AND THE LEARNING OF RULES

In Chapter III we began to examine a theory of human action that takes as it's point of departure the view that man is a distinctively moral, rational and social being and goes on to maintain, at least partly for this reason, that an understanding of practical contexts in which practices are observed, principles are obeyed, and rules are followed is essential to an understanding of the distinction between actions and bodily movements. With reference to this theory a crucial question is 'Just how is it that the notions of context and of following or obeying rules bear on the distinction between actions and bodily movements?'. Melden, who has been treated as the main proponent of the doctrine that what is distinctive about human actions is the fact that they are governed or guided by conventions, norms, rules, and so on, answers this question in two rather different ways. On the one hand, he contends, and this is the view examined in Chapter III, that an understanding of context is vital to an understanding of human action principally because actions are typically performed in social circumstances where what gets done is governed by rules of various kinds. Nevertheless, there is, on the other hand, another side to his theory which offers a very different account of the role of context and rules in relation to human action. This facet of the contextualist doctrine, which I shall consider in this chapter, in effect traces the roots of

one's humanity back to the social arena. By looking further into this proposal, which is an attempt to account for how it is that men come to be distinctively moral, rational and social beings, we shall encounter a number of as yet unexplored and unexamined issues relevant to Melden's view of 'human action'.

In order to place this facet of Melden's doctrine in proper perspective it will be helpful to return briefly to the beginning so as to consider the primary question towards which this inquiry is directed; namely, 'What is an action?', or as Melden has put it, 'How are actions to be distinguished from bodily movements or physiological happenings?'. 'Action', we have been told, is a social concept intimately bound up with the notions of context and rules. But what exactly does it mean to say that 'action' is social in this sense? For Melden, it seems to mean at least two distinct, though not unrelated, things. First, he seems to want to say that actions are social in the sense that they are performed (in "model" cases) in the social arena, where what is done is governed and guided by a complex network of conventions, norms, practices, rules and statutes. Consequently, to say that action is 'social' in this sense is to suggest that human actions are the sorts of things that admit of descriptions in moral and social terms. Now, since we have already examined this view at some length, I plan to say no more about it here. There is, however, a second respect in which Melden seems to think that 'action' is social. Roughly speaking, it is his view that the possibility of characterizing a person's actions (as distinct from the things that happen to him) in social and moral terms also derives from the fact that the language we

employ in talking about actions is acquired or learned in circumstances governed by an intricate network of social rules and conventions. In this chapter I want to examine this other aspect of his attempt to account for the social nature of human actions.

Let us then begin to consider Melden's notion that the concept of action is social in character by reason of the fact that we learn its use in the course of our dealings with other persons, and, in particular, by engaging in ordinary discourse about actions and agents. In explaining this view Melden once more invites us to consider an analogy. Suppose, it is suggested, that a book is placed before someone, say a child who is not yet able to read. In all likelihood he will see nothing more than a series of oddly shaped black marks on the white paper. However after the child has learned to read, supposedly by virtue of his having been trained, he will recognize letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, and so on. His training enables him to treat marks on a page in a manner quite unlike the way in which someone unfamiliar with the conventions governing the shape and arrangement of such marks would be inclined to regard them. Likewise, it seems that when someone performs an action we are able to see that, for example, he is raising his arm in a way that is analogous to the way in which the initiated can now read words and sentences on the page before them. The uninitiated, by contrast, observe only black marks because they lack the requisite training which would enable them to read. Similarly, Melden argues those unacquainted with the language-game having to do with agents and their actions would see only colourless bodily movements. Consequently he claims that training is

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essential if one is to become capable of treating bodily movements as actions, i.e., of seeing bodily movements as cases of actions. He puts it this way, " ... the activities in which we have been trained to engage in our dealings with one another constitute the substratum upon which our recognition of the actions of others rests".[1] Presumably what one acquires as a result of training, although Melden is vague in reference to this matter, is some familiarity with the concepts we employ in our everyday discourse about actions and agents. At any rate, we can return to this apparent problem shortly. The point Melden is attempting to make is that we learn to see someone raise his arm in a manner very much like the way we learn to read the sentence "The unexamined life is not worth living"; we simply, as it were, "read off" what he is doing just as we read off words on the printed page.

Part of what Melden is trying to convey by means of this particular analogy is that our learning to talk about human actions has its genesis in our ordinary relationships with other persons. In other words, the substratum to which he is referring is some form of social interaction. Now, clearly it does seem quite reasonable to suppose that acquiring a language, just like learning to read or to sharpen one's pencil, are indeed tasks the successful accomplishment of which requires the presence of others either directly (i.e., "in person"), or indirectly through books, recordings and the like. In the case of the young child, who at the outset lacks the requisite knowledge and skills involved in listening and reading (among other things),

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[1] Melden, op. cit., p. 187.

after a certain stage of maturation has been reached, he begins to acquire the language by being in face-to-face contact with those already initiated into and consequently capable of employing the language, i.e., his family or those charged with the responsibility for his rearing. Or, putting it another way, language is not an innate possession of ours, we do not enter this world already having mastered it. Therefore, it is something that must be acquired and this acquisition, whether it be of the language in which one talks about human action or indeed about anything else, occurs in large measure in the context and as a consequence, direct or otherwise, of human social relationships.

It may be argued that Melden's assertion that the concept of an action is social in character by virtue of the fact that we learn to use it in the course of our dealings with other persons, while in all probability true, will not suffice as a basis for sorting out actions and bodily movements. The concepts employed by coroners and physiologists in their discourse about bodily movements and physiochemical processes occurring in the organism are also acquired in and through social transactions with other individuals. The physicist, moreover, comes to embrace the concepts comprising the form of language having to do with inanimate matter by similar means. Consequently, to explain how it is that we have come to be in possession of the concepts we now employ in conversing about human action does not succeed in isolating any definitive properties of actions, bodily happenings or, for that matter, of any other form of discourse. What such an account does serve to illustrate is that language is fundamentally a social

activity. On this basis, however, it must be conceded that each and every concept in any language whatever is social in character. Hence, we best set out to uncover some additional implications of this analogy which might perhaps afford a more tendable foundation for making the distinction we are after.

When a child engages in the business of learning how to read, it is very likely that he begins by mastering his A B C's. From this point he may be led into being able to recognize the words 'cat', 'dog', 'mother', 'school', and so on, achievements which are, likewise, accomplished by means of practice involving repetition until the child gains at least a minimal ability to recognize these words when they appear in written form. His first sentences, including 'See Dick run', 'See the dog jump' and the like, are in all probability the sorts of things he learns to recognize as a result of his having been repeatedly exposed to them. In each case, what is acquired by the individual, by his having learned it, i.e., the ability to recognize letters, words and sentences, is in important ways governed by rather strict conventions; 'tca' is not the word 'cat' and 'dog jump the see' is not a properly formed sentence (or perhaps not a sentence at all), and so on. Conventions or rules, therefore, have a significant bearing upon the performances in which the child learns to engage when he has learnt to read. For instance, the rules of spelling and grammar enter into and structure in a general way his subsequent conduct in which is actions involve reading.

Having gained some idea of how conventions are related to reading, we must now inquire into what Melden means by 'training' as

well as into the way in which rules or standards are related to the ability to recognize actions -- a skill which, likewise, is apparently wrought by training. We must, in other words, attempt to become clear about the part played by convention in the child's training and, equally, about its role in his subsequent activities involving the exercise of the acquired skill, as a result of which he is able to see or "read off" straight away, i.e., without decision, judgement or (most significantly in my view) further information, that the rising of an arm is in actual fact the raising of an arm.

To begin with Melden, in his talk about 'training' seems to be referring to the broad spectrum of activities in the life of the family in which the young child is included and in consequence of which he learns language. After having attained a certain level of maturity, he begins, during his daily transactions with members of his family, to obey commands and follow instructions by recognizing certain sounds uttered by his parents as commands and certain other sounds as directions. In addition, he imitates a variety of things his parents do in attempting to have him do what they expect of him, such as pointing towards his room, or nodding their heads and smiling in approval at what he has done. And when he is comforted, clothed, fed, played with, and so on, he encounters still other activities involving somewhat different sorts of discourse. In these and countless other dealings with those about him the child, by coming to recognize the role in communication of these utterances and by responding appropriately to them, becomes a participant in these modes of social interaction. Furthermore, as he begins to acquire the concepts employed

by his parents in their relations with him he comes to recognize that his father is playing with him or that certain painful consequences are apt to ensue if he approaches the cookie jar without his mother's permission and so on. By gradually acquiring the ability to use the language employed by his family members he, thereby, becomes able not only to recognize that what they are doing is eating, playing with him, or telling him not to do something, but also to engage in the forms of discourse appropriate to these activities.

In short, many of the actions a child initially learns to recognize are those performed by his parents in their dealings with him. Most of the things his mother and father do in these contexts are guided by considerations, many of them moral and social in character, by virtue of the fact that their chief concern rests, in all likelihood, with the child's well being which entails adhering to or following, however roughly, certain prescribed principles. At the same time, the discourse they employ in their relations with the youngster is governed by moral and social standards as well as the rules of the language. Consequently, Melden maintains that:

> Only in the context of the specific activities which it has been trained to perform, as it grows into its changing roles with respect to its mother and the other members of the family, is it possible for it to understand the bodily movements of those participating in their diverse ways in the life of the family as the actions they are .... So one could go on to explore the manner in which the concepts of action and agent are enriched by relating to the wider scenes of social intercourse in which in diverse ways various social and moral institutions, conventions, statutes, etc., are relevant to the background activities against which bodily movements are understood as the actions they are ....[2]

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[2] Ibid., p. 190.

What we seem to have here, then, is an account which traces the development of an individual's ability to use language back to the language employed by those with whom he associates in various forms of social interaction. As the individual launches into participation in more and varied forms of social life he gains acquaintance, not only with the sorts of discourse appropriate to these transactions but, in addition, with the conduct expected of persons in these contexts by becoming familiar with the conventions which govern them. The rules and standards implicit in many such dealings among human beings, when mastered by the novice, provide him with some basis for understanding the conduct of others under certain circumstances. Such an achievement, namely, the ability to understand the actions of other persons, and indeed of oneself, is possible, so it would seem, as a result of training and learning by imitation.

However it should be pointed out that training is not without certain limitations, even that kind of training purportedly eventuating in a person's ability to distinguish actions and bodily movements. To begin with, initiates into a public form of life and thought can only be trained in or familiarized with certain routine and regularized modes of conduct, along with their attendent conventions, which are already widely practiced in the society of which one is a member. For example, he might recognize that two persons shaking hands are meeting or greeting one another, or that someone seated at a desk in a bank and making certain movements with a pen on a piece of paper is signing a contract. And, in the same way, by having learnt the rules of the road, he may come to expect that when a driver raises his arm in the

appropriate circumstances he is signalling. The supposition here is that both the spectator and the agent know the traffic regulations, and that the driver's performance may be described as an instance of following or obeying those regulations. Nevertheless, I would suggest that training alone is of very little help to the onlooker, if the person he observes raising his arm in exactly the same manner is seated next to the driver, or perhaps on a park bench. In other words, there are no rules in virtue of which one may "read off" what the agent is doing in these situations because the context provides us with no clue regarding the sorts of criteria, if any, applicable to the agent's performance. That is, confronted with a situation departing from the familiar routines into which one has been initiated through training one is apt to be at a loss should he be asked to say what the person is doing.

The concept of training is deficient in quite another sense in relation to the task for which it has been employed by Melden. At the beginning of this analysis, it appears that he has only modest ambitions in reference to the sorts of achievements that may be wrought through training; namely, the ability to treat or recognize specific bodily movements as cases of particular actions. Nevertheless, as the discussion unfolds it appears that training is of central importance if one is not simply to recognize but, furthermore, to understand the difference between bodily movements and actions. I would agree that training is perhaps a necessary prerequisite for the attainment of such understanding but it is not, as Melden seems to imply at various times, sufficient. 'Training' is ordinarily used in those contexts

where what is acquired on the part of the learner (trainee) is a rather definite "knack" or skill. For instance, we speak of training someone to operate an automobile, to swing a golf club correctly, to recite the alphabet, and perhaps to read and write. In other words, the notion of training finds suitable application in those cases where, as Peters puts it, " ... there is some specifiable type of performance that has to be mastered ... [and] little emphasis is placed on the underlying rationale".[3] Thus one might agree that training is essential if one is to recognize that what Jones is doing on this occasion is signalling and that the action he is performing in another situation is shifting down into a lower gear. In this respect the individual has learnt to recognize that specific performances are likely to be actions of a certain sort. However, to say of someone that he has merely been trained, seems an inadequate way of explaining how it is that he may understand why *all* behaviour of a certain sort is to be counted as 'action', as opposed to, 'bodily movement' or 'happening'. Questions of the form 'What is the difference between bodily movements and actions?' are inquiries, the answers to which will put one in a position to grasp what Peters has termed "the underlying rationale".

The point I would wish to underline here is that, while it may pick out an important way of starting persons on the road to achieving an understanding human action, training is, strictly speaking, a concept which does not encompass all of the very many routes one may take

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[3] R.S. Peters, 'What is an Educational Process', in R.S. Peters (ed.), The Concept of Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 15. For further discussion, see G. Ryle, 'Teaching and Training' in the same volume.

in arriving at the understanding in question. We learn by, imitating what other persons do, trial and error, having been taught, having received instruction, as a result of conversation, and so on. What is involved in someone's understanding the differences between actions and bodily movements is not reducible to the kind of "knack" or "know-how" involved in reading it off that this or that particular item of a person's conduct is an action of such-and-such a conventional variety. To make this suggestion is to imply that understanding human action is analogous to the knack of driving a nail into a piece of wood or that involved in sharpening knives, shaving, and very many other skillful Performances.

Be that as it may, all of these are minor problems when viewed along side the major difficulty inherent in this aspect of Melden's account. For even if we were to construe 'training' as broadly as possible, so as to take in all of the ways in which people may conceivably become versed in discourse about actions, conventions and rules (i.e., this might be done by equating 'training' with the notion of 'socialization'), such a move would not succeed in enabling us to distinguish actions and bodily movements, since precisely the same sorts of considerations must be taken into account in explaining the way persons learn to recognize bodily movements or happenings.

Melden's substitution of 'How do we learn to treat a particular bodily movement as an action of a certain conventional sort?' for the original question of 'What is the difference between an action and a bodily movement?' has, by virtue of this equivocation, extended the scope of the inquiry so as to include considerations pertaining to the

way in which language is acquired. In answer to the latter question, it is said that the distinction can be traced back and found to have its basis in the language one learns, so to speak, at one's mother's knee. One implication of this view is that the concepts one comes to have in one's possession play a vital role in the shaping of subsequent experience. That is to say, not only does language determine how we will conceive of what is taking place "in" and around us (that is, how we will describe it, explain and ultimately perhaps understand it); but, in addition, the concepts one has at one's disposal set certain limits on the sorts of thing one will perceive. One can agree with Melden on this point, without endorsing the further claim that this represents a peculiar characteristic of those concepts germane to our talk about actions. However, Melden does seem to suppose that this is the case when he suggests that training makes " ... it possible to understand the bodily movements of those participating in diverse ways in the life of the family as the actions they are ...".[4] By contending that a child learns to treat bodily movements as cases of actions Melden seems to be subscribing to the view that prior to acquiring any language one is capable of seeing only colourless bodily movements, e.g., arm-risings, knee-jerks, nervous twitches and the like. Yet as the novice becomes capable of using certain sorts of concepts, he begins to see arm raisings and very many other human actions. However, as I have attempted to argue earlier, understanding the concept of a bodily movement or learning to recognize human events as bodily movements (coloured, or otherwise), is equally an achievement dependent

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[4]Melden, op. cit.

upon learning the language in precisely the same sense as understanding the notion of action or learning to recognize bodily movements as actions. That is to say, one becomes conversant with the use of 'bodily movement' as a result of the same kinds of processes as those whereby he learns to use 'action'. In other words, if the child has no language he will see neither bodily movements nor actions.

Now in this phase of his analysis Melden has drawn attention to the important point that our language is very intimately connected with human social activity in all of its diverse forms, as well as with our perceptions of the behaviour of other persons and of the world in which we live. Nevertheless, his further claim that it must be possible to describe human actions in moral and social terms because, on the one hand, the child first learns language and thereby to recognize things that persons do in contexts guided by conventions, norms and what not, and, on the other, language itself is an activity the structure and use of which, in a general way, is determined by rules, must be rejected. To begin with language, be it our discourse about human conduct or our talk about the chemical or physical properties exhibited by certain substances when they are exposed to very high temperatures has ultimately the same origin — social intercourse among human beings. In the second place, the rules of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and so on, are applicable in the same way to every form of discourse. Accordingly, our talk about inanimate matter is equally directed by these same rules or standards. Moreover, to assert that the first actions a child learns to recognize and to perform are conventional, gives us no reason to suppose that everything he goes on to recognize

and to do from that point forward will be governed, implicitly, or otherwise, by conventions, norms, or tules. Consequently, any attempt to separate our discourse about actions from our talk about bodily happenings by, as it were, tracing the "root" of the former to dealings among persons simply will not do. Both forms of discourse grow from the same "root" but in the end they bear different "fruit". And, it is with the "fruit" of these activities that we are concerned when we ask "What is an action?". In short, rather than pursuing questions associated with *how* it is we come to use concepts in just the way we do, we should begin to concentrate our attention on determining *what* sorts of human behaviour are to be counted as actions.

The parallel suggested by Melden between our understanding of the characters on a printed page and the way in which we come to be able to understand bodily movements as the actions they are, is deficient in a number of crucial respects. First, it implies that conventions govern the form of a bodily movement such that it is immediately and obviously recognizable as an action of this or that kind, analogous to the way in which the rules of spelling, grammar, and so on, determine the arrangement of the characters on the printed page thereby enabling the reader to recognize the words and sentences on the page. In other words, it would seem that all one need understand is the appropriate convention under which a bodily movement of this sort is treated as an action of such-and-such variety in order to "read off" or recognize, like one reads what is on the page before one, the kind of action the agent is apparently performing. However, at best, this measure allows us to classify bodily actions as being of this or that

conventional type. It ignores the fundamental question which must be answered before the process of classification may begin it it is to be grounded on something more than inarticulate intutition or blind speculation. That is to say, from the point of view of the primary issues confronting us here, it must be first established what is to count as an action and what as a mere bodily happening in order that, from this beginning we might continue on to identify and enumerate different species of actions. In short, we must at the outset answer the question 'what is an action?' before we move on to consider 'What makes an action an action of a certain sort?'.

In the second place, the analogy Melden proposes places one in the position of the spectator (the reader as opposed to the author) when it comes to understanding human action. In other words, he seems to suggest that just as we understand the words, sentences, and so on, before us from our point of view, so too we view the actions of others from our own perspective and not that of the agent himself. Yet the agent's point of view must be taken into consideration if the nature of his actions is to be understood clearly, i.e., with a minimum of doubt in reference to what he is doing. In this way, we must determine what sort of understanding our so-called "reading skills" contribute to, and in what sense our understanding of human action is dependent upon the agent's point of view.

CHAPTER V

ACTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

H.L.A. Hart approaches the question of 'What is distinctive about human action' from what is perhaps best described as a legal point of view.[1] Where Melden and various other writers have tended to place great store in the usefulness of the analogy of a game in attempting to elucidate the concept of action, Hart maintains that by examining the ways in which certain concepts operate in legal discourse light can be shed on the very complex issues that arise in connection with human action. Some of these issues we have already encountered, still others we will meet with for the first time in the course of looking into Hart's views in this chapter.

Hart takes the position that many of the difficulties which beset both traditional and contemporary treatments of the problem of action spring from the presumption, made by a substantial number of the philosophers writing on this topic, that 'action' is a descriptive concept. Such an assumption, it is maintained, rather than enabling us to come to grips with the features characteristic of our talk about human activity, has led us down the garden path the result being that this

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[1] H.L.A. Hart, 'The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights,' Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Vol. XLIX (1948-49), pp. 171-94. Reprinted in A. Flew (ed.), Logic and Language. (New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., Anchor Books, 1965), pp. 151-74. Page references in the text will be to the later volume.

form of discourse has been forced into an artificial theoretical mould. Nevertheless, Hart thinks that the conceptual confusion generated by misguided attempts to construe 'action' as a descriptive concept can, in large measure, be overcome merely by resisting this temptation however enticing such a move may seem. As do the contextualists, Hart contends that social norms and rules play a very important part in our ordinary language particularly when the topic of our discussions happens to be the things that persons do. Nevertheless, he may be seen to differ with them inasmuch as he believes that the language we use in talking about action may be more adequately explained by regarding it as being analogous to certain species of concepts employed in legal practice and procedure.

From among a number of the distinctive features of legal concepts Hart explores in his essay, he singles out two of them suggesting that they are of special significance if one is attempting to analyze the concept of action. The first of these characteristics has to do with the relationship between the facts presented in connection with a certain case and the judgment or verdict given by the court in respect of that case. In order to examine this relationship we might consider, by way of an illustration, what may have been the plight of two elderly sisters named Brewster in the play *Arsenic and Old Lace,* assuming that their case had been taken before the courts. These two elderly ladies of kindly appearance, so one is lead to believe, out of a most "peculiar" sort of concern for the lot of a number of aging and (in their estimation) "lonely" men who visited their home on different occasions, have apparently offered their guests a glass of elderberry

wine containing arsenic, cyanide and strychine. Needless to say, those who partook of this lethal concoction, twelve in all, met their demise in a most expeditious fashion, and, quite in keeping with the wishes of their benefactors, were thereby relieved of the burden of their loneliness. Under the circumstances just described, and barring for the moment certain contingencies, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they would be found guilty of murder by the court before which their case appeared.

The evidence which may be brought to light in this instance would very likely include the fact that the bodies of twelve persons were found buried in the basement of the ladies home. A medical examination might reveal the presence of certain toxic substances in certain quantities in various organs of the victims. It may also be demonstrated, by virtue of a chemical analysis, that a wine decanter discovered in the house in question contained (along with certain alcoholic spirits) amounts of arsenic, cyanide and strychine sufficient to bring about the immediate death of anyone who might have been unfortunate enough to have consumed even a small portion of the substance. Moreover, further forensic investigations may have turned up fingerpints on the vessel containing the poisonous mixture which have subsequently been identified as those of the Brewster sisters, and so on. In this connection, one may therefore inquire 'What is the relation the legal conclusion or verdict brought down by the court to the effect that the sisters are guilty of murder, and the evidence which is adduced in support of this conclusion?'.

According to Hart, in the language of the law the relation between fact and law is ordinarily characterized by such epithets as

'the legal or consequences of the facts' of 'the conclusions of the law attaching to or drawn from the facts'.[2] Now talk about conclusions and consequences immediately suggests that, in legal decisions, there is some sort of logical linking (perhaps one of entailment or implication) of the facts regarded as premises on the one hand, and the judgment or verdict seen as the conclusion, on the other, as is the case in a deductive argument. However, Hart hastens to point out that to make this supposition is both to misrepresent and to oversimplify the actual workings of the law. The court in handing down its judgment may say something of the form, 'that a number of statements of fact are true, for instance that the bodies of the twelve victims were discovered in the basement of the Brewster home, etc., and that certain legal consequences attach to those facts, namely, that the sisters are guilty of murder'. Owing to the distinctive qualities of the legal concepts involved in a judgments of this kind, the manner in which statements of fact support or refute decisions in law cannot be assimilated, without distortion, to the model of strict logical inference. For example, from the facts cited in the Brewster case it does not follow logically that the sisters committed the murders. And still less does it follow that they are guilty of murder.

The characteristics of the broad notions of civil liability and criminal responsibility are such that, according to Hart, decisions or judgments handed down by courts in regard to matters of this sort are most appropriately regarded as "a compound or blend of facts and law".[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 161.

[3] Ibid., p. 152.

In other words, the vast majority of legal judgments are comprised of elements of two distinctive logical sorts; on the one hand, there are various matters of fact, and, on the other certain matters of law. In short, it seems that this contrast between 'fact' and 'law' is very much like that between 'fact' and 'value' in moral philosophy. The legal constituents which partially make up these "blends" are said to possess two properties or traits which are of some consequence for our inquiry into human action. To begin with, the role of the judge in legal proceedings is a practical one. That is to say, he bases his decisions upon the claims and defences along with the evidence actually presented in connection with a particular case; not upon those which may have been relevant to the issues involved but which, for some reason or other, have not been brought forward. In other words, his job is not to give the best judgment which is possible in theory. Nevertheless, it would not be fair to say that the verdict, for example that there is a valid contract, is simply the best judgment that can be offered given the sorts of claims, defenses and evidence placed before him: rather, says Hart, "there *is* a contract in the timeless sense of 'is' appropriate to judicial decisions".[4]

The second feature of the legal element in these compounds, arising out of the activity in which the judge engages, derives from the nature of his judgments themselves. The making of a legal judgment is not simply a matter of describing the facts, nor can it be identified with the business of drawing an inductive or deductive conclusion from those facts. On the contrary, it consists primarily in the interpreting

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[4] Ibid., p. 163.

or weighing of claims, defences, together with the evidence actually presented in the case, and in the selecting of precedents appropriate to that particular case. Now, because the conclusions reached by the judge depend upon these and similar considerations his role is quite literally one of deciding whether or not the Brewster sisters are guilty of murder, or whether a valid contract exists between two parties -- Jones and Smith. As a result, his judgment or verdict is essentially a matter of appraisal or evaluation. Consequently Hart wants to argue that, " ... What he does may be either a *right* or a *wrong* decision or a *good* or a *bad* judgment .... [and that] what cannot be said of it is that it is either *true* or *false,* logically necessary or absurd".[5] In this way, Hart rejects the view that the law may be regarded as a deductive system. By contrast, he underscores the evaluative or interpretive character of legal judgments in which the connection between the facts and the conclusion they support is not strictly speaking a logical one; but is, instead, fundamentally discretionary. That the kindly aunts of Mortimer Brewster are guilty of murder is a decision founded on precedents and arrived at in such a fashion that the evidence is deemed or judged to be grounds for the conclusion that criminal responsibility does attach to these persons for what transpired in their home. Thus, the second characteristic of legal concepts, deriving from the function of the judge, has to do with the primarily discretionary (as opposed to purely logical) character of these concepts. That is to say, the rules in virtue of which such concepts are applied or withheld from application are to some extent arbitrary.

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[5] Ibid., p. 162. Emphasis in the original.

Of the two features of legal decisions arising out of the role of the judge, Hart seems to regard the latter as being most germane to our ordinary talk about actions.

In short, in the light of these considerations, Hart maintains that certain key legal concepts do not, as some have been inclined to suppose, function descriptively in reporting the facts of the case or in recording conclusions drawn deductively from those facts. Rather, he insists, their primary use is acriptive, by which he means that their application depends on a blend of normative and factual considerations.

We have now to consider a second principal feature of legal concepts that Hart also regards as valuable in casting some light upon human action. This particular feature, intimately associated with the discretionary element in judicial decisions, arises from a consideration of the characteristic manner in which decisions or judgments handed down by the court can be challenged. Claims made in connection with the law of contract or accusations relating to the mental element in criminal liability (*mens rea*) are instances of the sorts of legal utterance which may on occasion be open to challenge or opposition. These challenges take the form of,

> ... a plea that although all the circumstances on which a claim could succeed are present, yet in the particular case, the claim or accusation should not succeed because other circumstances are present which brings the case under some recognized head of exception, the effect of which is either to defeat the claim or accusation altogether, of to 'reduce' it so that only a weaker claim can be sustained.[6]

For example, a judge may be adjudicating upon a claim that 'there is a

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[6] Ibid., p. 154.

valid contract between Jones and Smith'. One of the parties involved in the dispute may enter a plea that even though the normal requirements for the existence of a valid contract have been fulfilled there are certain other circumstances or factors which, if taken into consideration, should defeat the claim that a valid contract does exist. If such a move turns out to be successful it may have one of two consequences: on the one hand, it may defeat or destroy the claim altogether; or, on the other, it may "have a weaker effect, rendering it merely 'voidable' at the option of the party concerned".[7] The former species of defense, the effect of which may be to completely destroy a legal claim, and the latter which may eventuate in a claims being "reduced" or weakened, have been described by Pitcher as respectively "strong" and "weak defenses".[8] Since these expressions will be useful in subsequent discussions I should like to retain them. A claim or accusation bearing this characteristic, that is to say, which is subject to defeat in either the strong or the weak sense if certain conditions are present but which stands in the absence of such additional or extenuating conditions, is said to be "defeasible".[9]

In virtue of the defeasible character of at least some of the concepts employed in legal discourse, the manner in which they can be defined or explained differs significantly from the way in which we ordinarily analyze concepts, i.e., by setting down the necessary and

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[7] Ibid., p. 156.

[8] G. Pitcher, 'Hart on Action and Responsibility', The Philosophical Review. LXIX (1960), p. 232.

[9] Hart, op. cit., p. 155.

sufficient conditions for their application. Any adequate definition of these legal notions, such as the concept of the mental element in criminal liability, must take into account the defences or exceptions which serve to completely rule out or perhaps to merely reduce liability. As Hart has put it, " ... such concepts can only be explained with the aid of a list of exceptions or negative examples showing where the concept may not be applied, or may only be applied in a weakened form".[10] In other words, there are certain circumstances, depending upon the particular nature of the case up for consideration and judgment, wherein the conditions normally required for the application of a concept have been met; yet, owing to the presence of some exception, this set of conditions, while necessary, may turn out not to be sufficient for the application of that concept. He contends, for instance, that the mental constituent in criminal liability can be understood only by reference to a wide range of defenses including; Mistake of Fact, Accident, Coercion, Duress, Provocation, Insanity, Infancy, and so on.[11] Consequently by claiming that the aunts of Mortimer Brewster were insane their lawyer may succeed in persuading the court either to exclude them from any liability in the deaths of the twelve persons in question, or, perhaps, to reduce the degree to which they are deemed responsible in the circumstances. At the same time, should the circumstances of the case have been different, the sorts of defences which may have appropriately been pleaded might very well have altered and so, too, the definitions of the concepts involved.

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[10] Ibid., p. 154.

[11] Ibid., p. 159.

My concern thus far has simply been to explicate two features typical of legal concepts that in Hart's estimation are of fundamental importance in the understanding of our ordinary talk about actions. According to Hart, some of the sentences we use in our ordinary language are very much like the accusations, claims, judgments and verdicts which play so prominent a role in technical legal discourse. He cites certain everyday utterances including: 'This is mine', 'This is yours', 'This is his', as examples of expressions which embody something closely analogous to the judicial blend of fact and law. When they are used in certain contexts these sentences serve to ascribe or recognize rights in property. On such occasions they are not descriptions of events, objects, persons or states of affairs; rather, they are *ascriptions* or *judgements* based upon certain supporting facts in a manner that is akin to the way in which various statements of fact justify the decisions courts of law hand down. While it is true that 'This is mine' and similar sorts of expressions may not be recognized as genuine legal judgments, like the latter, they do contain reference to social conventions, in this case rules related to property. The technical concept of contract and the non-technical notion of property are not primarily descriptive. By contrast, they are essentially ascriptive being dependent upon social conventions and norms.

I should like now to consider in some detail the ways in which Hart sees his discussion of the language belonging to the practices and procedures of the law as bearing on the fundamental issue directing our inquiry, namely, the question 'What is an action?'. Now according to Hart a goodly portion of the philosophical perplexities that tend to

beseige traditional accounts of action are due to the fact that 'action' has been treated by many of these writers as a descriptive concept. In opposition to this view, he claims that sentences of the form 'I did it', 'you did it', 'he did it', analogous to 'This is mine' etc., are not primarily employed in a descriptive role; but rather, Hart contends, " ... their principal function is what I venture to call *ascriptive*, being quite literally to ascribe responsibility for actions much as the principal function of sentences of the form 'This is his' is to ascribe rights in property".[12] The roots of the relationship between action and responsibility go deep into the Western tradition being traceable back in the History of Philosophy at least as far as the thought of Aristotle. Consequently, it would seem to be of some importance to examine the nature of this connection, particularly as it is understood by Hart. Later in this essay I plan to return to and attempt to weigh some of the criticisms brought by Hart against what he regards as the orthodox descriptive analyses of action. For the moment, however, I should like to concentrate on his account of responsibility, particularly on his thesis to the effect that; whenever someone says 'He did it', or utters another sentence of the same form, the primary function of his utterance is to ascribe responsibility to himself or to some other person. To be more precise, I want to spend sometime trying to get clear about what Hart has in mind when he speaks of an ascription of responsibility.

In the course of explicating his position Hart frequently refers to an instance of a man hitting a woman in order to illustrate his

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[12] Ibid., p. 151.

contention. This sort of example appears to have been drawn from the type of situation in which there is doubt in the minds of some spectators concerning what has transpired. Thus in response to the query "Who did it?" or "Who hit her?", made in connection perhaps with a young lady busily collecting packages scattered about on the pavement near the exit of the bus from which she has just toppled, another onlooker may have replied "Smith did it" or "Smith her her". Under these conditions, Hart argues that the bystander in saying "Smith hit her" is not, at least not primarily, offering a description or report of the movements of Smith's body, although such physical facts, undoubtedly do enter into his accusation or claim. By contrast, he claims that in saying 'Smith did it' in this context, the onlooker is ascribing liability or responsibility to Smith. Statements of fact including 'Smith's body moved in such-and-such a manner in contact with the young lady whilst she was descending the steps of the bus' are looked upon as justifying or warranting the ascription of responsibility to Smith.[13]

In spite of the fact that the concept of responsibility plays a vital part in Hart's account, it is difficult to determine just what he has in mind when he speaks about someones being responsible for something. However, this is a matter about which we must become clear if we are to succeed in understanding his view.

The concept of responsibility is normally used in a variety of contexts to do a great many different jobs. To begin with, we sometimes say of someone that he (or she) is a responsible person, the

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[13] Ibid., p. 169.

implication being that there is something commendable about that person's character. Nevertheless, this particular sense of 'responsibility' would seem at best to have only an indirect bearing on the issues presently under discussion.

Professor Pitcher,[14] has outlined two additional sorts of responsibility which, on first inspection, appear to be rather more closely connected to Hart's talk about acriptions of responsibility. Since Hart's thesis treats of the notion of ascribing persons responsibility for actions, Pitcher restricts his comments to the kinds of contexts in which we ordinarily speak of a persons being *responsible for* something or other. To begin with, there are instances when we speak of a students being responsible for, say, submitting a philosophy paper by a prescribed time. 'Responsibility' thus employed is associated with someone's performing a particular task which has been assigned him or which he has taken upon himself. Under slightly different conditions, it is often said that, as a professor, one is responsible for such things as; turning the marks in his courses into the registrar prior to a certain date, keeping up with current research in his area of specialization, and so on. 'Responsibility' under these circumstances attaches to one's office or vocation. The matter of responsibility, also, comes up in connection with circumstances in which human beings, are required by themselves or the society in which they live to fulfill various obligations or to undertake certain commitments. For example, in our current social order we maintain that the parent is responsible for the

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[14]Pitcher, op. cit., pp. 227-31.

education of his children, or I may undertake responsibility for feeding and watering the neighbour's parakeet whilst they are on vacation. Similarly, persons possessing certain characteristics are sometimes said to be responsible for spending a specified amount of their time in their countries military forces and for paying taxes, and so on.

Cases of the sort mentioned above Pitcher regards as exemplifying one species of responsibility. Part of what is meant when a person is said to be responsible for something or someone, in this sense, is that there are certain things he is expected to do or to have done, or that there are obligations which have been imposed on him by himself or by his society which he *ought* to fulfill.[15] 'Responsibility' when it is employed under these circumstances involves what Frankena has characterized as a "straight normative judgment of obligation".[16]

Pitcher illustrates what he regards as a second fundamental type of responsibility, distinct from the one discussed above, by having us consider an example similar to the situation involving the young woman who suffered the unfortunate fall from the bus. Let us suppose that she was struck by Smith just as she had begun to descend the steps and that, as a result, she tumbled heavily to the pavement. We might further assume that she sustained a fractured arm as a consequence of her fall. Provided that Smith had deliberately pushed her (maybe she was the wife of his former employer and he believes that she was instrumental in his being dismissed from his position), Pitcher would maintain that one may

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[15] Ibid., p. 227.

[16] W.K. Frankena, Ethics. Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs; Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 56.

quite properly say that Smith is responsible for the ladies misfortune; that is, for her falling from the bus and for the bodily harm in which the fall eventuated. If, on the other hand, Smith had been propelled into her whilst she was in the process of disembarking from the bus, perhaps owing to the fact that the vehicle suddenly started on its way, he contends that it would not be appropriate or right to say that Smith is responsible for her misfortune. Rather, since *prime facie* he appears not to have been at fault in what took place, we could only properly say that his hitting the woman was responsible for it. Thus, according to Pitcher, to say of someone that he is responsible, in this sense, for some event or state of affairs X is to claim that: "(a) X is a consequence (or result or upshot) of something he has done, and (b) if X is unfortunate (felicitous), then, under certain conditions, he is deserving of censure (praise)".[17]

Since Pitcher's formula appears to embody a view of responsibility that is more relevant to Hart's account of sentences of the form 'He did it', it is worth looking into what he has to say on the subject in more detail. To begin with, however, it is important to recognize that 'responsibility' functions in two quite different ways in the formula. Consequently, before we attempt to discover how what Pitcher has to say can be used to clarify what Hart has in mind, we had best begin by getting clear about Pitcher's proposal. In the first place, he uses 'responsibility' as one might expect to find it employed in, for example, a newspaper account of an airline disaster. Such a report may say something like "The ailerons failure to operate was responsible for

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[17] Pitcher, op. cit., p. 228.

the airliners crashing into the runway and, ultimately, for the deaths of one hundred and nine persons". The expression 'responsible for' as it appears in the journalist's story has the same meaning as 'the cause of'. This species of responsibility is commonly labelled as "causal responsibility". Similarly, when Smith is propelled into the woman passenger by the sudden and violent movement of the bus, it may be said that his body or, more precisely, the movement of his body (among a number of other factors) is causally responsible for her toppling to the pavement. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the concept of responsibility, as Pitcher has outlined it in this formula, cannot be applied to everything a person causes to happen, but only in connection with those things which are brought about in virtue of something he has done (presumably an action). Third; according to this formula, responsibility is further restricted so as to apply just to those cases in which something one does leads to favourable or unfavourable results, but is apparently inapplicable in the event that the outcomes of a persons doing are, so to speak, "neutral" or unknown to anyone. In spite of the unfavourable consequences, it would not be proper to say that Smith is (or was) responsible for them, according to the current formula, inasmuch as her fall did not result from something Smith did — his action. Yet it is quite correct to say that Smith's hitting her, or better the movement of his body, is (or was) responsible, causally speaking, for her having been injured. Thus, it does seem that the concept of responsibility is being used in two different senses in this particular context. By reason of the fact that the distinction is left unexplained, I would suggest it becomes a source of

confusion for Pitcher in some of the criticisms he puts forward in connection with Hart's position.

Pitcher's primary concern, like that of Hart, consists in dealing with the notion of responsibility only insofar as it has to do with human actions. We have just considered a case where a man is responsible for (i.e., the cause of) a woman's being injured although her injury did not result from an action performed by him. However, if one is to make good the claim that Pitcher, in setting down his formula, has failed to distinguish two different, though perhaps related, senses of 'responsibility', we must confine our attention, at least for the moment, to things persons do in contrast to what happens to them. To this end it is appropriate that we concentrate on an example, of Pitcher's own construction, in which he deems it proper or correct to speak of responsibility in the manner prescribed by the formula. His example is one of a man who jilts his lady friend and where, as a result, she suffers a nervous breakdown. Insofar as responsibility for the young lady's collapse is concerned, there are apparently two possibilities, depending upon the nature of the circumstances in which she was jilted. On the one hand, if her suitor terminates their relationship in a cruel and thoughtless way, Pitcher would want to say he is responsible for her emotional condition and, furthermore, that he is deserving of censure for what has taken place. Apparently a second possibility emerges provided that the young man had jilted his lady friend in a considerate or gentle fashion; or as Pitcher says, had he been justified or without fault in jilting her, then " ... we could say at most only that his jilting of Cecilie is responsible for

it".[18] The only obvious difference between the two cases lies in the particular manner in which the jilting was done in virtue of which one mode of conduct is regarded as justifiable and the other not. That is to say, in both instances the young man's jilting his girlfriend is responsible for, or, equivalently, is the cause of, her emotional breakdown. But we are told that in only one of these cases is it appropriate to claim that her suitor is responsible for her collapse and that consequently he is deserving of censure. Hence in order to sort this matter out we must inquire into the difference between these two cases. His talk about justification in connection with certain courses of action or modes of conduct yields a clue to what else Pitcher may have in mind when he speaks about responsibility as well as about blame and praise. 'Responsibility', in this sense of the term, would seem to be intimately related to the issue of whether or not what the person has done is right or wrong and, hence, whether or not his conduct is capable of being justified. For example, when Jones jilts Cecilie in a cold-hearted manner the suggestion would appear to be that he has done something wrong, perhaps he has broken a moral rule and that, as a result, it would be appropriate to hold him responsible and, thus, to blame or censure him for what has occurred. In other words, to say of Jones that he is responsible in this sense for the young woman's breakdown would seem to be tantamount to claiming that, in the circumstances, his actions (or their consequences) are of such a nature, i.e., wrong and not justifiable, that it would be appropriate, or indeed right, to hold him accountable or liable for them thereby leaving him open to blame or

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[18] Ibid., p. 228.

censure. Therefore, when Pitcher speaks of someone's being responsible for something according to his formula, he would also appear to be talking about the conditions in which it would be right on legal, moral, or other social grounds, *to hold them responsible* for their conduct and *bring them to account* in connection with it. In short, the differences in responsibility attaching to the respective ways in which Jones might have jilted Cecilie is only explicable by reference to how each mode of conduct might fare under some sort of moral or social review, that is to say, whether it is deemed right or wrong, justifiable or unjustifiable.

It has not been my aim in entering into a discussion of 'responsibility' to provide any sort of thorough-going analysis of this concept. To attempt to do justice to this very complex topic would require space far in excess of that available to me here and, most significantly, it would take us much beyond the scope of the present investigation. My interest at this stage of the inquiry has simply been to survey a number of uses of 'responsibility' and to try to differentiate among them in order to discover those uses of the term which bear most directly upon our concern with Hart's analysis of action. It is of particular importance that we arrive at an understanding of what Hart means by "responsibility" if for no other reason than that it will enable us to assess the adequacy of his position.

Let us now consider Pitcher's attempts to employ his formula in order to clarify Hart's analysis. This will give us an opportunity to further examine and evaluate both accounts with a view to coming to grips with Hart's doctrine.

Hart has said that whenever, in answer to a question like 'Who did it?' or 'Who hit her?', someone, on the basis of having witnessed certain physical movements of Smith's body, replies "Smith did it" or "Smith hit her" (or utters some other equivalent expression) he is primarily ascribing responsibility to Smith for his actions. To begin with, Pitcher remarks that when Hart speaks of a person's responsibility for his actions, such as robbing a bank, he cannot be suggesting that robbing a bank is something that one is expected or obliged to do. In other words, 'responsibility for' in this context obviously cannot be identified with an obligation to perform a certain act or series of actions. Secondly, he maintains, 'responsibility for' cannot be construed as 'the cause of' in this situation by reason of the fact that robbing a bank, for which one may be ascribed responsibility, is not the causal consequence of something one does -- it *is* something one does. That is, to say that a person is responsible for his actions cannot mean that he causes or brings about his actions because, according to Pitcher, we do not causally produce our actions, we just do them. I would agree with Pitcher's claim that Hart has not meant 'responsibility for' to be rendered in the causal sense. However, it is worth noting at this point that Pitcher's own analysis of responsibility, as I have been at some pains to show, is not purely causal; it involves an element of accountability or liability as well. Thus, while he may have made out a fairly plausible case for claiming that Hart cannot be employing 'responsibility' in the causal sense, he has not and, indeed, cannot rule out the possibility that he is using it in connection with accountability or answerability by the same argument,

because they represent two distinct sorts of responsibility -- a distinction Pitcher, himself, seems to have overlooked in his own criterion of responsibility.

Pitcher, in his quest to unearth what Hart means develops another example that has all the appearances of being the sort of paradigm Hart has in mind when he contends that to say 'He did it' is to ascribe responsibility to someone for their actions. One is invited to:

> Imagine, then, that there is a play period in a kindergarten classroom and that the teacher leaves the room for a time. On her return she notices that the vase on her desk has been broken. She asks the class who did it and Jane reports, "Johnny did it".[19]

Nonetheless, Pitcher finds even this instance an unsuitable paradigm of the kind of situation in which it would be correct to speak of a person's being responsible for their actions. The teacher who inquires 'Who did it?' (or, alternatively, she might have asked 'Who is responsible for this?') while pointing to the pottery shards, is simply trying to discover who it is that caused the vase to be in its present condition, or according to Pitcher, her query may be interpreted as asking 'Whose act it was that resulted in the smashing of her vase?'. The point is that the teacher has assumed that someone has caused the breaking of her vase and Jane's saying "Johnny did it" merely singles out Johnny as the one who brought about this minor disaster. In this way, by use of the expression "Johnny did it" in this context, Johnny has had responsibility ascribed to him not for something he has done, but instead, for the result or upshot of something he has done, namely the fact that a once beautiful vase is now lying in an enormous number of minute fragments

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[19] Ibid., pp. 228-29.

on his teacher's desk. Hence Pitcher concludes that this is nothing more than another instance of someone's being responsible for the consequences of their actions -- viz., causally responsible.

There are, as I have already suggested, some possible sources of difficulty in Pitcher's account, particularly in connection with his analysis of "Smith did it" as it relates to the concept of human action. At any rate, we may pass over these matters now. I shall come back to them indirectly in discussing Hart, inasmuch as there seems to be fundamental agreement between the two on the area I believe to be troublesome. For the moment, I should like to move to consider Pitcher's conclusions regarding the kind of responsibility ascribed by someone's uttering 'He did it' etc., since they do seem to shed some light on the thesis Hart is seeking to defend.

Pitcher has gone on to maintain that,when Hart argues that sentences of the form 'He did it' ascribe to person's responsibility for their actions, he is not speaking about responsibility at all. Rather Pitcher insists, he is talking about praise and blame, punishment and reward. That is to say, if a person performs a good action we find him deserving of praise and by contrast, in the event that his action is bad, we deem him to be deserving of blame or censure for what he has done.[20] There does appear to be a kernel of truth in Pitcher's claim and it would seem to be this; that whenever people concern themselves with whether someone's actions are desirable (good) or undesirable (bad) and, furthermore, with whether or not it would be appropriate to blame or praise them for what they have done, they are

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[20] Ibid., p. 230.

fundamentally interested in the conditions under which it would be right to *hold a person responsible* for their actions. On such occasions, one is not merely out to discover, as Pitcher has quite rightly remarked, if in fact a person X has caused an event A to take place; our foremost aim in these circumstances is to decide or determine whether we ought to hold him accountable for his action or its consequences.

Responsibility for actions in contexts of this variety is not identifiable with causal responsibility, but is part and parcel of the practice Baier has characterized as bringing persons to account for violating certain sorts of moral or social rules.[21] Hence, when one assumes or assigns responsibility for actions appraised as desirable, or undesirable one is making a moral or some other species of normative judgment, not a causal inference or judgment. To say of someone that he is deserving of censure, or that he *ought* to be censured, is but one way in which a person may be *held responsible* on moral or other social grounds in virtue of what he has done. In short, *being responsible for something* is one thing, and *being held responsible for it* is something else again.[22]

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[21] Kurt Baier, 'Responsibility and Action,' in Myles Brand (ed.), The Nature of Human Action. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott-Foresman, 1970), pp. 100-16. Baier, in fact, has distinguished five senses of 'responsibility' or five different claims that might be made in ascribing responsibility to someone. None of these need concern us here as we are primarily interested in the broad activity of bringing persons to account, i.e., ascribing responsibility to them.

[22] J.A. Shaffer, The Philosophy of Mind. Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 90. Shaffer makes the same point by arguing that a person may be held responsible (even by himself) for something he is not responsible for. In addition, he may be responsible for something and not be held responsible for it. In other words, the concepts of a person being responsible for something and his being held responsible or liable for it are, strictly speaking, independent of one another.

To sum up on Pitcher's commentary on Hart; in speaking about blame and censure, Pitcher does seem to have hit upon at least part of what Hart has in mind in his talk about responsibility. Nevertheless, when he claims that Hart is actually referring to a person's being deserving of censure and not to responsibility at all, he is, I think, mistaken. To be blamed or praised for something is one way, among others, in which persons may be held responsible or accountable for their actions. Thus someone's being deserving of censure and their being held responsible are not so distinct as Pitcher seems to be claiming. They are both elements of the broader activity of bringing persons to account. This brings me to the second main point I should like to raise concerning Pitcher's analysis of responsibility: namely, his contention that it is *only* for the consequences of their actions that persons are praised (or censured). Now, while it may well be the case, as Pitcher suggests, that persons are sometimes censured or praised for the consequences, or the causal upshots, of one's action, it is also true that persons are held responsible, on occasion, for their actions with no mention whatever of the consequences being made. Consider a case where someone bursts into loud guffaws in a church while the minister is delivering his sermon. The looks of righteous indignation inscribed on the countenances of some of the more "devout" parishioners are surely condemning the man primarily for his actions and not for their consequences. Moreover, a person may have liability ascribed to him for his failure to perform certain actions, e.g., when one neglects to signal before turning left. Pitcher is, in my view, quite correct in claiming that people are sometimes held responsible for the consequences of their

actions. But he goes too far in insisting that it is only for the consequences for which they may be held responsible. And, finally, the sharp distinction between liability and censurability that Pitcher assumes, but does not argue for, represents an artificial attempt to separate two intimately related constituents of a broader social practice of bringing persons to account. Consequently, it seems to me that his criticism of Hart on the ground that the latter has conflated responsibility and censurability is misbegotten.

That Hart has in mind something very much like the notion of holding persons responsible for their conduct, in his talk about statements ascribing responsibility, may be evidenced by his contention that they are a compound, analogous to the blend of fact and law characteristic of legal decisions. 'He did it', e.g. 'Smith hit her', Hart maintains:

> ... is an ascription of liability justified by the facts; for the observed physical movements of Smith's body are the circumstances which, in the absence of some defense, support, or are good reasons for the ascriptive sentence 'He did it'.[23]

In other words, 'He did it', 'You did it', 'I did it' and so on, expressions which ascribe liability, cannot be construed merely as statements that describe the movements of some person's body (or indeed the consequences of those movements). Such claims, as is the case of judicial decisions or judgments, depend upon various statements of fact for support, but are, themselves, not the sort of expression about which it may be said that they are true or false. Inasmuch as the rules comprising the other fundamental element in the compound are evaluative or

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[23] Hart, op. cit., p. 169.

normative, 'He did it', akin to its counterparts in legal discourse, can properly be said only to be right or wrong; under no circumstances can it be regarded as being either true or false. Consequently, Hart would seem to be taking the position that ascriptions of liability or responsibility are most appropriately understood as a species of value judgment. To ascribe responsibility to Smith for pushing his former employer's wife from the bus, or to Jones for the scandalous manner in which he jilted Cecilie, is to suggest that their respective behaviours are in need of appraisal, in these particular instances, from the moral point of view. The business of assigning, assuming, or otherwise ascribing responsibility is summed up very well, in Shaffer's observation that,

> In such cases we do not merely describe the world objectively and coldly. We also take a stand, render a verdict, and commit ourselves to the practical consequences of praise and blame, punishment and reward, approval and disapproval.[24]

Thus it seems sensible to conclude that Hart is speaking about a judgment of value, as opposed to some type of causal judgment or inference, when he says that 'He did it' is essentially a non-descriptive sentence ascribing responsibility for actions.

It would now seem that all that remains to be done is for us to examine the validity of Hart's contention that, whenever an individual says 'He did it', and so on, the primary function of his utterance is to ascribe responsibility to someone for their actions. However, to attempt an assessment at this stage of the discussion would be, I think, premature. For by setting about the examination of this thesis, so to speak, on its own, we face the distinct possibility that we shall be

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[24] Shaffer, op. cit., p. 91.

unable to recognize the forest for a tree. That is to say, one of the paramount issues in Hart's paper has to do with the connection between 'action' and 'responsibility'; yet, if we focus our critical attentions upon his initial thesis in isolation, it is not unlikely that this broader and more vital matter will either be obscured or, at best, given only piecemeal consideration. For this reason, I think it more helpful to place this particular claim in the context of his account of human action and then go on to examine his overall position after having provided a background against which to evaluate his specific claims.

In his essay Hart is occupied, in part at least, with the same problem that has given rise to our investigations; that is to say, the question 'What is an action?' or 'What distinguishes the physical movement of a human body from a human action?'. He finds traditional attempts at answering these questions, such as those which seek to conjoin a mental event (an act of will, perhaps) and a bodily movement, unsatisfactory. On his view, such doctrines make the mistake of supposing that 'action' can be analyzed in terms of some set descriptive statements dealing, as he puts it, "wholly with a single individual". In other words, the kind of analysis to which Hart takes exception trades on the assumption that 'action' is, essentially, a descriptive concept. In opposition to this view, Hart maintains that 'action' is fundamentally ascriptive in character being primarily employed in sentences, not to characterize some sorts of physical or psychological events in a person but to ascribe liability or responsibility to him. However, he does acknowledge that physical movements do play the part of supporting or justifying such ascriptions. The distinction between

an action and a physical movement, he suggests, is comparable to the distinction between our ordinary notions of property and earth (terra firma). The concept of a piece of property, unlike the concept of a piece of earth, is non-descriptive; it is, by contrast, dependent upon social conventions associated with the ascription of property rights, ownership, and so on. So too with the distinction between 'human action' and 'physical' or 'bodily movements', the former concept is intimately related to moral and societal rules having to do with ascribing responsibility; whereas the latter is used purely in a descriptive role. Hart neatly summarizes view of action as follows:

> In other words, though of course not all the rules in accordance with which, in our society, we ascribe responsbility are reflected in our legal code nor vice versa, yet our concept of an action, like our concept of property, is a social concept and logically dependent on accepted rules of conduct. It is fundamentally not descriptive, but ascriptive in character; and it is a defeasible concept to be defined through exceptions and not by a set of necessary and sufficient conditions whether physical or psychological.[25]

Let us now begin to examine Hart's theory of action more closely. To begin with, Hart maintains that action or, more precisely, sentences of the form 'X did it', like certain concepts employed in legal discourse -- the concept of contract for example, is both ascriptive and defeasible. Hence, presumably, when he contends that the concept of a human action is an ascriptive one, what he means is that the question of whether or not a particular item of behaviour is to be counted as an action, is largely a matter of discretion or judgment. Since this type of judgment is purportedly analogous to decisions handed down in courts of law, it too is composed of two elements; one related to certain norms

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[25]Hart, op. cit., p. 169.

or rules, the other connected with matters of fact. The principal element in the compound, from which the judgment apparently draws its distinctive character, is evaluative, the reason being that the rules involved in judging are normative. That is to say, the basis upon which any particular movement is appraised are rules setting down standards of acceptable behaviour in the circumstances. Hence, according to this analysis, to say of someone that 'He has performed an action' (or 'He did it' if we use Hart's paradigm) is primarily to pass judgment on that person's behaviour. The specific standards of proper conduct about which Hart is speaking, and which I have discussed at length, are those having to do with 'responsibility' in the sense of accountability or liability. Thus to claim that 'Smith hit her' (i.e., 'Smith performed an action') is to imply Smith ought to be held responsible inasmuch as his conduct was deemed unacceptable.

The factual element involved in claims made in regard to human action would consist in a statement, or possibly a set of statements, describing the physical movement of some person's body. Consequently Hart maintains that by saying 'Smith hit her', one implies that Smith's body moved in certain ways and that, moreover, his body or some part of it (perhaps an arm) came into contact with another individual -- in this instance a woman. That the expression 'Smith hit her' involves mention of the physical movement of Smith's body, is nonetheless, of only secondary importance to the primary role of these sentences -- ascribing liability. Finally, owing to the fact the norms, from which action sentences borrow their fundamental significance, are normative (as opposed to descriptive) in character, 'He did it' and claims of

the same form do not admit of truth or falsity. As one species of value judgment, among others, they are properly regarded only as being right (good) or wrong (bad).

In the second place, Hart believes that the notion of action has another feature in common with certain concepts employed in legal discourse -- it is defeasible. In saying that action sentences (e.g., 'He did it') are defeasible he means that they are open to challenge in a manner very much similar to the way in legal decisions connected with, for example, 'contract' or 'the mental element in criminal responsibility' are subject to opposition and perhaps refutation. Specifically, he is maintaining that there are situations in which it would ordinarily be quite correct to say that 'a person has performed an action' (i.e., where all of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of 'action' have been satisfied) and, yet, owing to the existence of certain other circumstances or factors, the claim that 'He did it' must be erased or at least modified. Suppose, for instance, that it has been said that 'Ramsbottom handed over the briefcase containing the top secret documents to the bearded man with bloodshot eyes'. On Hart's view, this sentence is open to question in either one of two ways. In the first place, the man against whom the charge is levelled " ... can make a flat denial of the relevant statement of physical facts", e.g., by saying something to the effect that "It was not I -- it was Tweedsmuir who did it".[26] This type of objection is a "strong defense" against such an accussation since, if it turns out to be successful, it completely destroys the initial claim. The second means of challenging action sentences, we are told, while not as

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[26] Ibid., p. 170.

effective as the first, involves an appeal to one of a wide assortment of "weaker defences". A move of this sort, if it meets with success, does not destory the charge entirely. It simply serves to weaken or reduce it.[27] Among the list of "weak defences" or exceptions which reduce this type of claim are the further contentions that; 'It was an accident', 'He was coerced', 'He was temporarily insane', or that, 'He acted under great provocation', and so on. Hence, in reply to the accussation that 'He handed over the briefcase containing the top secret documents to the bearded stranger', Ramsbottom might argue, in his own defence, that he was coerced into doing so perhaps at the point of a pistol or, under different circumstances, he might have maintained that he is from time to time overcome by an irresistable impulse to give highly confidential information to persons bearing the outward appearance of newspaper reporters, and his transaction with the suspicious looking fellow was just one occasion of his acting on such an impulse. In either of these cases, rather than wiping out the charge that 'He did it' altogether, a plea that extenuating circumstances were present, in the event that it succeeds, has the consequence of having the judgment qualified to read 'He did it under coercion'. In other words, the decision that is ultimately allowed to stand is a weakened form of the original 'He did it' which may now read 'He did it under coercion'.

From our discussion of Hart's doctrine thus far, it is quite evident that his account of action begins from the same sort of perspective as that adopted by Melden, Peters and the other contextualists. That is, each of these analyses of 'action' make the common assumption

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[27] Ibid.,

that 'action' is an essentially moral and social concept. While it is perhaps true that by taking the line that action is an ascriptive, as opposed to a descriptive concept, Hart has managed to overcome some of the difficulties facing Melden's account; nonetheless, the fundamental problems inherent in the latter's position are still present in Hart's treatment of the matter. And for this reason his position is likewise untendable. In order to explain the difficulty let us look more closely at his claim that to say of someone 'He has performed an action' (i.e., 'He did it') is first and foremost to ascribe responsibility to him.

To begin with, Hart is attempting to maintain that there is an intimate, indeed a logical, connection between 'action' and 'responsibility'; since, from his point of view, the claim that 'one has performed an action' entails that 'one is responsible (i.e., liable) for it'. In other words, talk about 'human action' necessarily involves talk about standards of acceptable conduct having to do with the liability of persons for what they have apparently done. However, against this claim, it may be argued that many of the actions persons perform daily are of such a nature that issues having to do with one's accountability or liability for them -- the matter of censure or punishment, and so on -- are never raised simply because these performances and, for that matter, their consequences involve no transgression or violation of the norms of "proper" conduct. I may, in the course of working quietly away in the solitude of my office, rub my nose, light my pipe, open the book before me and commence jotting down notes for my next lecture. Now each of these specimens of behaviour are quite clearly

cases of action — they are not merely physical movements. And yet only under very special circumstances would I be held responsible for acting in any of these ways. In short, there is no reason to suppose that, in reference to a great many of the actions done by human beings, the question of whether or not they are defensible is ever raised; they simply pass unnoticed or if they happen to be noticed they remain unappraised, especially, from the point of view that is of most concern to Hart.

In reply to this objection defenders of Hart's view may be quick to point out that the issue here is not one of whether a person is, as a matter of fact, held responsible for a particular action, such as lighting one's pipe. The issue, it might be argued, is instead one of whether such behaviour is the sort of thing for which a person can be held responsible. Now, while this rendering does seem to make Hart's thesis somewhat more plausible, I should want to maintain that in the final analysis the proposal is, nevertheless, untenable. For it is only in certain circumstances — roughly, when the things persons do, in one way or another, actually impinge on the lives of others or when they have demonstrable moral or social significance — that it makes any sense to speak of holding person's responsible or bringing them to account for what they have done. Yet, according to this latest proposal, there is quite literally nothing one does that is not open, at least in principle, to this form of scrutiny. And it is this view that I think is, likewise, mistaken. Consider the case of a person who lights his pipe or cleans his fingernails in quiet solitude. On the present view, there are two possibilities. Either we can give free

reign to our imaginations in order to contrive a set of background circumstances so as to make it seem that they are the sorts of thing for which one might very well be held responsible — given the imaginery circumstances, and thereby stretch the notions of liability or accountability beyond all recognition. Or we can take the heroic line that things done in solitude are not really actions at all, or that, if they are actions, they are only so in some degenerate sense of the term. Neither alternative, I suggest, is defensible. And for this reason I would maintain that this modification does nothing to salvage the claim that responsibility, in the sense of accountability, attaches to all of our actions.

Secondly, it can be argued the matter of responsibility does not come up solely in connection with actions. That is to say, there are situations in which persons have responsibility ascribed to them or are held accountable, but not for an action or its consequences. When we hold a certain child's parents responsible for neglecting his emotional needs, one is surely not suggesting that it is their actions (or the results of them) for which they are deemed liable. Rather it is their failure to act in ways conceived of as desirable in the light of current social norms (i.e., they omitted doing as they ought to have done) that is being held up for appraisal and judgment. In a similar vane, there are other sorts of cases where liability attaches to certain persons, not in virtue of actions they themselves have performed, but owing to the fact that they are responsible for the actions of other individuals. Thus, when we speak of a father's being responsible for the debts incurred by his spend-thrift daughter who has not yet

attained the age of majority, we are ascribing responsibility to him for her behaviour ("misbehaviour") and its consequences. Therefore, in virtue of these considerations, it would seem pretty clear that one can talk about human actions quite apart from the business of ascribing or assuming responsibility for them. To put it another way, 'responsibility' of the sort which Hart has in mind is not a conceptual characteristic of 'action'. It is not so evident, however, that one can talk about 'action' completely divorced from the concept of responsibility in all of its senses. At any rate, this matter is of no particular concern at present and may be left for further discussion in connection with the notion of agent causality in the next chapter.

Let us turn to consider a related aspect of Hart's view; namely, his contention that sentences of the form 'X did it' are fundamentally acriptive. He has attempted to maintain that, owing to their ascriptive character, the sentences we employ in talking about actions play an evaluative role in our discourse. As a result, they cannot be said to be true or false; instead, they admit only of being right or wrong judgments. In the final analysis, this claim amounts to a somewhat restricted version of the doctrine put forward by Melden and others, suggesting in effect that all human actions are circumscribed by rules. Hart's view is restricted in that the only conventions with which he is ostensibly concerned are those having to do with moral and some other sorts of social responsibility. Now, it might be agreed that an element of appraisal does enter into some of our talk about actions by way of moral and social imperatives which prescribe acceptable behaviour; in this particular case, when we set out to determine the

conditions under which it would be appropriate to hold persons responsible for their actions. But to say this is by no means to suggest that evaluation is characteristic of our discourse about human action in its entirety. In point of fact, while judgments of value may and sometimes do arise in certain circumstances; a sentence like 'Smith did it' is either true or false depending on whether or not Smith did it. Questions associated with the rightness or wrongness and the goodness or badness of actions come up, if they come up at all, only after it has been assumed or established; first that an action has been done and, second, that the action is of such a nature (undesirable or perhaps forbidden) that it is thought that someone ought to be ascribed liability for it. The point here is that if, as I have attempted to show, 'action' can be characterized independently of the notions of moral and other forms of social responsibility, it follows that the issue of whether or not it is proper to hold Smith responsible for his action is a further question. It is, therefore, this subsequent judgment which is characteristically ascriptive — not the judgment that Smith performed an action or, more precisely, that Smith did it.

Furthermore, it seems to me that there are equally good reasons for rejecting the related view that 'action' is a defeasible concept. According to Hart when, we say that someone has performed an action (for example, 'Smith hit her') this sentence, like claims in law regarding the existence of a valid contract, is purportedly subject to challenge and, thereby, the possibilities of reduction or defeat. Now, according to this analysis, all that is ordinarily required in order to say that 'Smith did it' is the occurrence of the relevant physical

movements of Smith's body. Yet there are, one is told, special circumstances where, even though the conditions normally required for contending that 'Smith hit her' have been met, this claim may be rebutted by either strong or weak defenses. In the event that these challenges turn out to be successful, they can respectively destroy or reduce the charge that 'Smith hit her' (or, equivalently, that Smith has performed an action'). Suppose for instance that our friend Smith, in replying to this accusation, had gone on to explain that he had been, as it were, "thrown" into the young lady by the sudden movement of the bus. From Hart's point of view, in virtue of the extenuating circumstances, there is not adequate support for the claim 'Smith hit her'; only a modified claim, perhaps to the effect that 'Smith hit her accidentally' could properly be sustained. But how, one wants to inquire, is the claim that 'Smith did it' "reduced" by adding that it was done accidentally, as a result of provocation, inadvertently, etc? The answer is, quite simply, that it is not! Rather, the weak defenses mentioned by Hart serve to fill in certain details concerning the circumstances in which the relevant physical movements occurred. They in no way alter the claim that 'Smith hit her' or that the movements have taken place. By contrast they would serve most appropriately as grounds for diminishing the extent of Smith's liability in connection with this event.

If there are doubts concerning what it is that accident, coercion, and so on, serve as weak defenses against, there are similar perplexities surrounding this issue in connection with the so-called "strong defense". Pitcher has maintained that what is essential to a defeasible concept is that there should be stronger defenses against its applica-

tion as well as weaker ones. Now Hart takes the position that a strong defense against a claim like 'Smith hit her' consists in an outright denial of the relevant physical facts. In other words, in spite of the fact that the conditions usually required for saying that 'Smith did it' e.g., 'Smith hit her', have been fully satisfied, there are further and distinct conditions present which completely overthrow the initial claim. Pitcher, however, points out that by denying the relevant physical facts, in this case that Smith's body or some part of it moved in contact with the young woman, one is suggesting in effect that the requirements for applying the concept of Smith's hitting someone have not been met to begin with. Consequently a strong defense amounts to both an affirmation and a denial that 'Smith hit her' is applicable to the case -- all in the same breath. This is surely a mistake. Since, in cases of this sort, a strong defense would consist in the total rejection of the initial charge, Pitcher maintains that such a move cannot be construed as a genuine strong defense against a claim about action. In respect of Hart's view on this particular issue he says:

> What he has not shown, and what he must show, is that if all the normal necessary and sufficient conditions are met, there are still defenses which can defeat the claim that Smith hit her. Surely he cannot show this; and so his contention that the concept of human action is a defeasible one must be rejected.[28]

Despite the fact that I harbour some very serious reservations concerning the background to Pitcher's argument here (particularly relating to what he believes to be the necessary and sufficient conditions for holding that someone has performed an action), I would be

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[28]Pitcher, op. cit., p. 234.

inclined to support his conclusion. The essential point he makes here is that neither strong nor weak defenses, of the sort Hart seems to have in mind, are challenges to claims of the form 'X did it'. More importantly, the general point is that matters having to do with the defensibility of one's behaviour or the vindication of particular courses of action (on moral and social grounds) enter into our talk about human actions only when there is some discussion concerning the propriety of what has taken place and whether, in addition, it would be appropriate to ascribe to that person responsibility for that action or series of actions. That is, the problem of the justifiability of Smith's actions can legitimately be raised only after it has been independently established that he has done the action(s) in question! In other words, the concepts of legal, moral, and various other types of social responsibility, are the relevant ascriptive and defeasible concepts — not, as Hart attempted to argue, the concept of action. Whether these latter concepts are properly thought of as being essentially ascriptive is, of course, another matter. But it is one that need be of no further concern to us here.

In summing up our discussion of Hart's attempt to explain the difference between a human action and a physical movement of the human body, there are one or two general comments about his manner of dealing with the problem which need to be made. In the first place, the question 'Who did it.' when put by someone in the sort of context about

which Hart appears to be speaking is ambiguous.[29] As a result, the appropriate replies to such a question — 'He did it, 'You did it', and so on — are, likewise, equivocal. When the teacher (mentioned in one of our earlier examples) upon returning to the classroom inquires of her pupils 'Who did it?' or 'Who broke my vase?', she is assuming that some person rather than some event, such as a sudden gust of wind, caused her vase to fall to the floor and shatter. Yet, even granting the initial plausibility of this supposition, neither the question nor the reply that 'Johnny did it' need imply that Johnny has performed an action. That is to say, the statement 'Johnny caused the vase to shatter and fly into literally hundreds of tiny fragments' is perfectly compatable with either the claim 'During the course of an epileptic seizure Johnny's arm struck the vase which resulted in its breaking' or the claim that 'Johnny intentionally hurled the piece of precious pottery to the floor thereby causing it to break'. Yet, in the former case, it is obvious that Johnny did not perform an action. Thus, all that may be safely concluded when someone says 'Johnny did it' in these circumstances is that Johnny's body, or some part of it, is thought to have moved in certain ways.

Talk about things persons do brings us back to the problem we encountered in connection with Melden's attempt to explain this same distinction by appeal to a contrast between doings and happenings.

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[29] One may at this point contrast Hart's analysis of 'He did it' and so on, as ascriptions of responsibility with that proposed by J. Feinberg 'Action and Responsibility,' in A.R. White (ed.) The Philosophy of Action (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 109. Feinberg argues that such expressions are primarily used to identify the doer of an already known doing. The point is that only under very restricted circumstances does 'He did it' operate as a paradigm of action, its ordinary use being to identify alleged doers.

Both Hart and Melden seek to gain support for their respective views by an appeal to ordinary usage. However, as we have seen in the case of the broken vase, their particular approaches will not do. Indeed many of the verbs grammarians classify under the label of "verbs of action" are ambiguous in precisely this respect; that is, they leave it unclear in regard to whether the person, whose movements are characterized by use of these verbs, has performed an action, or whether he has simply undergone a muscular spasm which may have caused his arm to move in the manner it did, in actual fact, move.

The second general point I want to make concerning Hart's theory of action is that the genesis of the difficulties in his view, I would venture to say, lies in his having taken the legal metaphor too seriously. This is evident from his supposition that, " ... the sense our actions are ours is very much like that in which property is ours ...".[30] The net result of his having adopted this particular point of view is that Hart seems to have given an account of human action which concerns itself ultimately with nothing more that the ownership of physical movements. In other words, greater significance is attached to legal, moral and other social conventions by reference to which a person's movements are appraised than is given to the agent and his actions.

Finally, it should again be pointed out that neither Hart nor Melden seem to entertain the possibility that there may be some sorts of actions performed by human agents which involve no observable bodily movements. That such a possibility has not entered the

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30 Hart, op. cit., p. 167.

discussion thus far is, I would suggest, a very direct consequence of their preoccupation with those actions having both immediate and obvious social (i.e., moral and legal) import. Conventional social practice notwithstanding; in order to come to grips with our question 'What is an action?', we must be prepared to consider the human agent not only in the social arena where his conduct bears quite directly upon the lives and pursuits of other persons but, also, in the context those activities in which he engages on his own, which touch perhaps only in an indirect way (if at all) upon the lives of other persons. We must, therefore, begin to take into consideration questions relating to the authorship of actions, rather than resting content with accounts which seem to address themselves to matters more closely connected to the ownership of bodily motions — in order to provide an adequate account of 'human action'. This issue is of primary importance if one is concerned with the enterprise of describing, as contrasted with simply appraising or classifying, that species of human behaviour characterized as action. It is with these views in mind that I should like to turn my attention to an analysis, sometimes referred to as the "Theory of Agency", which concentrates on describing the individual and his behaviour.

CHAPTER VI

ACTION AND AGENT CAUSATION

As our investigation into human action has progressed one thing has become increasingly apparent; it is that no matter how commonplace and familiar an idea, such as the notion of a human action, might initially seem to us, it is very often no simple task to give content to the concept by means of philosophical analysis. This is, of course, not to say that some valuable gains have not been made nor is it to suggest that certain worthwhile insights into the problem have not been acquired as a result of our inquiry thus far. The point is that the mystery surrounding action appears to be every bit as complex and just as bewildering as it was in the beginning. However, while it might very well be that the key to this conceptual puzzle is not yet within our immediate grasp the number of places in which we might reasonably go searching for it have, I think, been significantly reduced. The discussion in this chapter will provide us with the opportunity to consolidate our gains and to coordinate the insights we have achieved thus far.

This brings us to a new avenue for exploration which will form the core of our concern in this chapter, namely, a theory put forward by Richard Taylor which is sometimes referred to as -- "The Theory of

Agency".[1] Professor Taylor's theory represents a comprehensive attempt to deal with a wide variety of matters related to the understanding of human behaviour. His primary interest, however, lies in discrediting and proposing an alternative to the mechanical or quasi-mechanical conceptions of human action which have abounded in the literature of both philosophy and the social sciences (especially empirical psychology) since Descartes. He, therefore, eschews as fundamentally mistaken the efforts of those who would seek to describe and explain a man's actions in terms of cause and effect. Furthermore, in a number of important respects, the framework within which Taylor deals with questions concerning human conduct marks a significant departure even from the approaches taken by those philosophers canvassed earlier in the context of this inquiry. Owing to the nature of this investigation and to the limits imposed on us by space and time we cannot begin to consider all of the very many issues upon which his study focuses. For these reasons, our explorations will be for the most part confined to the two components of his analysis which bear most directly on the aims of this inquiry.

The examination of Taylor's position will proceed in two stages so as to correspond to distinguishable but interrelated movements in the central argument he is advancing. In this way, the first portion of the chapter will address itself to the task of appraising Taylor's

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[1]The focal point of the discussion of The Theory of Agency will be the version of it presented in Taylor's Action and Purpose (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966). In addition, occasional reference will be made to his Metaphysics, Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series, 2nd. ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974) and to his essay 'Thought and Purpose' in M. Brand (ed.), The Nature of Human Action (Glenview, Ill.: Scott-Foresman and Co., 1970), pp. 267-282.

idea that action is a descriptive concept and that, moreover, there is an essential difference between sentences we employ in describing a person's actions and those we make use of in the description of the rest of his behaviour. Discussion in the second portion of the chapter will be devoted to a detailed consideration of the underpinnings of Taylor's doctrine which derive from what he characterizes as "The Metaphysics of Causation". It is in this context that he emphasizes the crucial role played by the agent in human activity, a point which, he maintains, is all too frequently glossed over in a great many theories purporting to account for human behaviour. On the basis of the discussions here, we should come a good way further towards unearthing the illusive key for which we have been searching and, thereby, laying hold of the slippery concept which has seemed to evade us at every turn.

I

Professor Taylor begins his discussion of the concept of human action by taking the position that we can, almost intuitively it seems, distinguish between those items of our behaviour in relation to which one is essentially active and those in connection with which one is essentially passive. This distinction appears to correspond, although perhaps only in a rough and ready fashion, to the one suggested by the expressions 'the things one does' as opposed to 'the things that happen to one'. (While this particular contrast (i.e., between 'doings' and 'happenings') has been examined earlier and in

some detail, in the course of discussing Melden's analysis of action, it is worthy of reconsideration here, since, although he employs the same notions, Taylor arrives at conclusions that are, nevertheless, very different from those drawn by Melden and other contextualists writers. Taylor believes that "doings", or actions, might very well include such things as; my moving my hand, my moving my hand and causing my desk to move, my working a puzzle out in my head, and so on. "Happenings", or specimens of "mere" behaviour, by contrast, may consist in such things as; my hand's moving, my hand's moving thereby bringing about the movement of my desk, the beating of one's heart, the multiplication of one's white blood cells, a tunes persistently running through my head in spite of all my efforts to concentrate upon solving a mathematical problem,etc. Now in the first set of examples one is, or at least would seem to be, active in producing these various motions or changes. The latter instances, however, are thought to be representative of a class of behaviour of quite a different sort -- happenings or changes that one passively undergoes. On the present analysis, the distinction to be made here is one between 'acts' (or equivalently 'actions') and those events or processes, " ... which I am helpless either to make happen or prevent from happening in any direct way".[2] What is the nature of this distinction and by reference to what kind of criteria is it to be drawn?

Taylor initiates this part of his inquiry into action by canvassing a variety of criteria that may, *prima facie,* seem to be of some assistance in differentiating those sorts of human behaviour which are,

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[2]Taylor, Action and Purpose, p. 58.

from those which are not, actions. There are a number of things which may be said of actions which cannot be correspondingly affirmed of those forms of behaviour characterized as "events" or "happenings". To begin with, it would appear to be quite in order to command someone to perform an action, for instance, to move his hand. By the same token, it would also be appropriate to forbid him to move it or to likewise request that he refrain from moving it.[3] Yet, to enjoin someone to perspire or to heal a wounded finger, in precisely the same way that he moves his hand, is to make a request which is plainly incongruous. Of course, I might order Jones to perspire but not, as it were, straight away without expecting that he do something else first, such as running to the campus bookstore and back. The point is, however, that quite apart from whether the upshot of the exercise undertaken by Jones is his beginning to perspire, his collapsing from sheer exhaustion, or perhaps both; these occurrences are just things that happen to him. They are not anything he does, in the sense in which moving a finger may be something he does. Injunctions of this species, therefore, seem to be out of place when directed towards those items of a person's behaviour that are not actions.

Although it is obvious that actions are the only sort of human behaviour properly subject to commands, prohibitions or requests, this criterion will not do as a means of making the distinction being sought for two important reasons. In the first place, a good many of the actions done by persons are performed in the absence of any

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[3] Ibid., pp. 104-106.

injunctions whatever; issued by others or, indeed, by the agent himself. Secondly, Smith's stalking out of the room, for example, might very well be an action he performs in express violation of the teacher's advice that he return to his seat, i.e., the implication in such a request being that he refrain from doing what, in point of fact, he did. Consequently, Taylor argues that the difference between actions and happenings cannot be made to rest upon whether one species of behaviour, but not the other, may be commanded, enjoined, or forbidden. In short, it is not a necessary condition of some item of behaviours being counted as an 'action' that it be associated with some sort of prescription or prohibition.

The second main assumption with which Taylor takes issue is the widely held view that actions must of necessity involve outward or "overt" bodily movements. He rejects this presumption claiming that some actions, even though they are outward forms of behaviour, involve no bodily motion or change.[4] Certain acts consist in the interruption or the bringing to an end of some change which previously had been taking place. He invites us to consider an instance of my not breathing, in case it is an action of mine. Now there are those who might wish to argue that such an occurrence is nothing more than my stopping my breathing, and in consequence that it is properly construed as a mere change of state -- not as an action. Yet, one does not require the full interval, during which my breathing has ceased, just in order to stop it. My action does, nevertheless,

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[4] Ibid., p. 106.

continue over the entire segment of time, such that at any instant during the course of that interval it would be quite correct to say that I am doing something, namely, holding my breath. Others might claim that the fact of someone's holding their breath can be adequately expressed by saying that 'their breathing had ceased for such-and-such a time'. Clearly this will not do. For the assertion that 'Jones stopped breathing for a certain period' is compatible with either the claim that 'he performed an action', or, by contrast, the claim that 'something happened to him', i.e., that something caused a momentary interruption in his breathing — a sharp blow to the abdomen perhaps. In short, to say that Jones' breathing stopped is to tell only a part of the story. In order to complete the account, we must say, in addition, that Jones stopped it — that he performed an action. Thus, Taylor does seem to have made out a case for maintaining that there are some actions done by persons which do not involve overt bodily motions or changes.[5]

Discussion of this matter brings us to Taylor's third main contention about actions; namely, that in performing an action a person need do nothing overt or publically observable.[6] We might suppose that, while sitting in a philosophy lecture, I attend to a particular

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[5]It is worthy of note, at this stage, that in 'Thought and Purpose,' op. cit., p. 268, Taylor proposes that the concept of motion ought perhaps to be understood in the "Aristotelian Sense" " ... to mean change, rather than as meaning the more specific sort of change which he Aristotle called local motion (loco-motion), or change of place (locus)". The possibility of interpreting 'motion' in this way is a vital element in Taylor's thesis that thought or, more precisely, thinking is sometimes an action, which is discussed in this Chapter.

[6]Action and Purpose, p. 107.

argument which is being presented and, in addition, that a short while later during these same proceedings I do something else. I may, for example, try to recall the title of a paper in which the author had taken a similar stand on such an issue. According to the present account, my attending to the lecture and my attempting to recall the title of an essay are, both of them, things I do — not things that happen to me. That is to say, both episodes involve my performing an action. Nevertheless, my doings consist in no publically observable behaviour.

We may also suppose that, when the professor has completed his analysis of the argument, I turn my attention to something else, such as a friend's request that I explain the argument because he has failed to understand it. Now, at his urging, I might simply reiterate what the lecturer has said verbatim, thereby making public what it was I had been attending to. Admittedly, one very often publically recounts one's recollections about certain events or expresses one's reflections on certain matters to others. But, and this is the crucial point here, there is no necessity that they be given this public airing — just in order to warrant some observer's inference that I had been acting. In other words, there are circumstances under which, and for any number of reasons, I may simply keep them to myself or, in this sense, "private". Hence, my failure to report my reflections, or the results of the other mental activities in which I from time to time engage, does not, as certain philosophers and psychologists have sought to maintain, undermine the claim that I have been acting. Furthermore, on those occasions when I do publicize certain of my

thoughts, say by discussing them with an acquaintance, I am performing another action separate from the other doings about which I am informing him. In any case the main point that Taylor wants to make is that certain of the actions we perform do not involve publically observable behaviour.

It will be helpful at this stage to elaborate what seems to be the obvious significance of Taylor's claims, particularly the latter two, in reference to the goals of our inquiry, since in order to give an adequate account of human action, we must come to grips with views of the sort that Taylor has expressed. That is to say, if one addresses oneself to the question 'What is an action?' or 'What sorts of things are to be counted as human actions?' directly (as opposed to treating them indirectly in a framework where something other than giving an analysis of actions is the principal concern) then one must recognize the purport of such assertions. Their purport is, to my mind, just this — that there are some actions done by human beings which neither are, nor do they involve, observable bodily movements. There is a tendency on the part of a number of contemporary philosophers to try to give an analysis of 'action' while considering all and only those actions which involve some observable bodily motions. Justification for this view is usually sought by appealing to one of two major presuppositions; both of which are, as I shall argue, of at least questionable character, if not positively erroneous.

On the one hand, certain of these philosophers are persuaded that by restricting their concerns to this special class of actions, their investigations may turn up some valuable clues in the search for

the solution to one of the thorniest problems in philosophy -- the mind-body problem.[7] Against this view it may be argued that such an inquiry creates its own "problem" by assuming the distinction in the first place. And more to the point, it should be said that it is perfectly possible and indeed desirable to seek, as far as possible, to give an account of actions without alluding to this controversy. To put it another way, one can quite sensibly talk about 'mental actions' and 'physical actions' without committing oneself to the view that there are two independent though somehow related (or "correlated" as the case may be) arenas in which such activities uniquely occur, or from which they separately originate, namely "mind" and "body". An analysis of 'human action' aimed, as ours is, at providing an answer to the question 'What is an action?', need presuppose no particular theory of the relationship (if any) between mind and body and may, therefore, be consistent with any number of them.

A second group of philosophers, specifically certain of those concerned with problems in legal and moral philosophy, exclude purely mental activities from the province of their investigations. However, the move is made in this context for quite a different reason. These writers attempt to rule out, or discount, talk about actions which are not bodily actions (i.e., which do not involve a physical aspect) by making an appeal to the dubious supposition that only bodily actions are of direct legal or moral significance. In more precise terms, the assumption here is that legal or moral responsibility (and the

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[7]For an explicit statement of some of the supposed advantages of this approach see J.A. Shaffer, Philosophy of Mind, Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 80.

attendant notions of 'praise' or 'blame' and 'reward' or 'punishment', and so on) attach peculiarly, and somehow much more directly, to physical actions.[8] On this doctrine, a person's raising their arm is regarded as being of more immediate consequence for moral purposes than a person's deliberately refraining from raising it. However, I would want to argue that claims of this nature are both mistaken and naive. They are mistaken in that they rest upon the false presumption that there is a logical connection between 'action' and 'legal' and/or 'moral responsibility'. The obvious difficulty with this assumption is that it overlooks the fact that some cases of human action are of no legal or moral consequence whatever. For example, while I am alone in my study I may perform any number of actions such as picking up my pen and placing it back on the desk again. Surely any attempt to raise the question of my accountability in connection with this and indeed in relation to a great many similar episodes is otiose. Furthermore, even if the question were to be raised, which is highly

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[8]The moral philosophers point of view in this connection is articulated by Shaffer, Ibid., and also seems to be part and parcel of the view sketched by A.I. Melden, 'Action,'in D.F. Gustafson (ed.), Essays in Philosophical Psychology (New York: Doubleday and Company, Anchor Books, 1964), p. 58 when he says, in the first place, that, " ... I shall reserve the term 'action' for the cases in which what an individual does can be in principle and in the appropriate circumstances the subject of moral review" and secondly, that, "When I perform an action, there is always some bodily movement that occurs ...". The implication here being that any action (all of which necessarily involve bodily movements -- by definition) under certain circumstances is open to moral appraisal. One may very well agree that it is only actions of appropriate sorts which are likely to be brought to the attention of some sort of moral tribunal; but for the purposes of moral appraisal and evaluation, the question of whether actions are primarily mental or physical in character hardly ranks as a criterion of appropriateness in this connection. In fairness to Melden, it should be pointed out that this does not seem to have been the primary intent behind these remarks, nevetheless, they readily lend themselves to this interpretation.

improbable, it would have to be independently established that I had performed an action. In brief, it is perfectly possible to talk about actions without concerning oneself in the slightest with legal responsibility or its moral counterpart. And when such issues do come up, they arise as separate matters to be settled on distinct grounds of their own.

This position is naive in its apparent endorsement of the view that the only activities of direct moral or legal import are bodily ones. One need only consider situations like the one in which a teacher refrains from raising her arm in self-defense because she believes it wrong on ethical grounds to intimidate a child, to recognize that refrainings are, likewise, morally significant items of behaviour. That is, her omitting to raise her arm to deflect the blow might very well have been an action of hers: an action which may have been the result of forethought and planning and which, in the circumstances, may also have demanded the exercise of control in the face of her "natural inclinations". Furthermore, she may have achieved this end by doing something else mentally, like counting to ten. In this situation, her counting to ten would have been the crucial element in her refraining from frightening the agressive student. Still, even if one were to grant (as we need not) that bodily actions *ordinarily* have more immediate impact on the lives of other persons than do their mental counterparts, this would not warrant the conclusion that mental activities have no moral impact at all. For these reasons, it seems clear that legal and moral theorists, as well as philosophers of mind must be prepared to take into account

actions that do not involve bodily movements, i.e., mental actions, refrainings, and such other doings as holding one's breath, if their theories are to reflect anything approaching an adequate analysis of human action.

To summarize the discussion on this point: I would want to suggest that, although it is true that moral and legal philosophy, and the philosophy of mind have vested interests in the concept of action, there is perhaps more to be gained by way of additional clarity and depth of understanding if one attempts to give an analysis of action that will stand independently of the specific commitments of these other forms of inquiry. Certain accounts, like those cited above, have apparently been handicapped by reason of a prior and principal commitment to answering questions of a different sort rather than dealing directly with the notion of action. Addressing the issue, while taking it for granted that, for example, the distinction between thought and action is both a clear and obvious one, or that man, whatever else he may be, is essentially a moral being, and so on, is problematic simply because these presuppositions may themselves be open to serious question in the light of the findings of such an inquiry. Consequently, attempting to answer the question 'What is an action', while taking as little for granted as possible, is perhaps the most promising route we might pursue.

Let us very briefly review the course of the discussion thus far. Taylor has argued that by focusing our attention on assertions about the behaviour itself, we cannot discover a means of marking off the things a person does from the things that happen to him. In other

words, the examination of certain items of behaviour, in the light of such criteria as; whether it may be enjoined or forbidden, whether it involves a physical aspect or not, or whether or not what transpires is publically observable, reveals that none of them enable us to distinguish a person's actions from the things that happen to him. Indeed, Taylor maintains that it is impossible to make this distinction by reference to any set of criteria which are exclusively behavioural in character. Now, if the distinction we are after cannot be made on the basis of an inspection of the behaviour, how then, if at all, is it to be drawn?

Taylor assumes that our discourse about human actions is primarily descriptive, as opposed to ascriptive or evaluative, and, moreover, that by looking closely at action-language we might be able to gain some insight into what distinguishes actions from other forms of human behaviour. Accordingly, he sets about attempting to answer the question of 'What sorts of things are actions?' by examining the sentences commonly employed in the description of human events. He believes that such an inquiry will yield results that are considerably less misleading than those to be gained from investigations based on the sorts of criteria or presuppositions we have just been discussing, i.e., whether the behaviour is publically observable, etc. In consequence, he begins by asking us to consider certain pairs of sentences such as the following; 'my hand moves' and 'I move my hand', 'a certain tune occurs to me' and 'I recall a tune'. Now, according to Taylor, the first set of descriptions, having to do with the movement of a hand, differ in one very important respect. 'My hand moves' is used to pick

out a physiological change or event in a particular human organism. An event so described is nothing more than something one suffers or undergoes. 'I move my hand', by contrast, describes a human action or something one does.

The second pair of sentences, i.e., 'a certain tune occurs to me' and 'I recall a tune' is intended to show that a similar separation (between 'mere behaviour' on the one hand and 'action' on the other) can also be made in connection with talk about goings on in the mental sphere. The difference in each of these pairs of sentences, he argues, amounts to this; the first statement in the pair makes no explicit mention of an agent, while the second statement explicitly refers to an agent (myself in this case). And this is no accident. For on his view, " ... there must always be an essential reference to an agent in the description of any act".[9] Thus it would seem that Professor Taylor regards what might appear to be superficial grammatical differences as being of rather a good deal more significance.

Yet, might it not be possible for someone to object that action sentences have no unique claim to make upon references to oneself or to other persons, even when we confine ourselves to the realm of discourse concerning human behaviour. Sentences including 'my hand moves', 'Jones' eyes blinked as he came out into the brilliant sunlight' or 'I was reminded of a tune when I heard someone whistling it' etc., likewise, appear to involve references to myself or other persons. When it is reported that 'Jones' eyes blinked', is it not the case that this

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[9]Taylor, Action and Purpose, pp. 108-09.

statement refers to Jones? After all, it is his eyes, and not those of some other person, that are said to behave in such a manner. In short, since these sentences make mention (albeit indirectly) of a particular individual, must they not also be construed as descriptions of the things he does — his actions?

In response to this line of argument, Taylor might be prepared to admit that it is true to say of 'my hand moved', 'Jones' eyes blinked', and other descriptions of the same species, that they too involve mention of a person (or some "part" of a person). Nevertheless, and in spite of the apparent similarity between the two sorts of statement, he would claim that they are fundamentally different. That is to say, the reference to Jones in 'Jones' eyes blinked' — far from being essential — derives primarily from certain social conventions (those relating to grammar or to private property one might suppose) rather than from anything distinctive of the behaviour being described. As such, it is merely incidental. The fact my hand moves, as opposed to the fact that I move my hand, can be completely expressed in terms of physical changes (i.e., electro-chemical processes taking place in various neurons, the transmission of certain nervous impulses, muscular contractions, etc.), occurring in some body, it matters little whose, located in a particular place at a certain time. That some human being is picked out, directly or indirectly, in the description is of minor consequence; the major point being that he is not, under these conditions, referred to *as an agent*. In other words, in the description of a human action, the reference is not merely to the person as, so to speak, the "owner" of the limb or the related behaviour, but to that

person as the agent — as the author or performer of that action.[10] In contrast, reference to myself, in the sentence 'my hand moved', is incidental since, by hypothesis, it is descriptive of an item of my behaviour which is not an action of mine.

Clearly not all goings on in the realm of human behaviour lend themselves as readily to such an apparently straight-forward identification as do the contrasting statements 'I move my hand' and 'my hand moves'. Suppose that my arm goes up because a colleague of mine raises it. We might imagine he has done this in order to register another "yes" vote in support of a motion before a committee of which we both are enfranchised members. I may have had no part in what takes place since, being devoutly a-political, I may, some moments prior to this particular incident, have dropped off to sleep. To adequately characterize what has transpired on this occasion would seem to require that reference be made to some person as an agent, by reason of the fact that the motion of my arm was intimately associated with an action done by someone, although it was no doing of mine. Consequently, in addition to picking out someone in the action description, we must indicate that he was the author or performer of the act. In brief, to describe a person as the initiator or performer of an act is to describe him as an "active being".[11]

Whenever I raise my arm or silently generate and entertain various conjectures regarding my paper, I am the initiator of what takes place in a way in which I cannot be said to be the originator of

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[10] Ibid., p. 109.

[11] Ibid., p. 111.

whatever goes on in case my arm rises or when thoughts, as it were, wander randomly through my mind prior to my falling asleep. As a result, Taylor contends that the principal element separating our descriptions of things persons do from reports characterizing things that happen to a person is that the former, unlike the latter, necessarily involve this reference to a person as an active being — as a human agent. In this way he argues that 'I raise my arm' entails that 'my arm goes up', but that 'my arm goes up' carries with it no implication that 'I have raised it'. The simple motion of my limb may have been the upshot of a nervous disorder from which I now and then suffer; or perhaps an acquaintance, carried away by political ambition, has lifted it upwards. In either case, I am a passive being (a patient) so far as the behaviour of my arm is concerned; whereas, relative to the raising of my arm I am an active being -- an agent. This point, we are told, can also be made by saying in connection with any human act that, " ... we shall not describe it as an act until we state that some agent has caused it".[12]

From all appearances it may look as if we have arrived at the point where, in relation to any description of human behaviour whatever, all we need determine is whether reference to the agent is essential, or whether it is not, in order to decide if the particular item of behaviour thus described is an action or a happening. Unfortunately, however, the matter is not so simple as this. There are some rather obvious and very significant questions that our discussion of Taylor's analysis has not dealt with directly so far. Were it to

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[12] Ibid.,

be left as it presently stands much, confusion would in all likelihood beset any attempt to make use of this distinction in its current, unexplicated form. One of the crucial problems confronting the analysis at this stage, and one which Taylor never really does seem to come to grips with, surfaces when one attempts to distinguish between situations in which we might properly say 'Smith went to the shelf and withdrew the book in order to use it as a reference', from those in which it would be appropriate to say 'Smith went to the shelf and withdrew the book whilst he was sleeping soundly'. Both specimens of behaviour may very well be alike so far as anyone can see. Furthermore, on each occasion Smith would appear to be causing or initiating the movements that do occur, in the sense that no one or nothing else, excepting Smith, appears manifestly active in relation to the respective episodes. Consequently, if, from the point of view of this doctrine, one is to succeed in differentiating between accounts descriptive of the somnambulistic wanderings of Smith and those purporting to report his actions, we must begin to explore what it is that Taylor understands to be the nature of and the difference between the things one does and the things that happen to one.

II

The task that presents itself to us now is one of unearthing the reasons why reference to an agent, as the cause or originator of what takes place is deemed essential, in cases of "doings" but not in cases of "happenings". Moreover, we must seek to discover what is meant when it

is said that the agent is the cause of his actions but not of the things that happen to him. In other words, we must become clearer about the conditions under which, on Taylor's analysis, we are warranted in saying of someone that 'he has performed an action'.

Most persons, it seems fair to say, would agree that there is a difference between the raising of one's arm and the rising of an arm owing to a muscular spasm: yet, the business of trying to say what this difference amounts to has turned out to be a rather formidable undertaking. Earlier it was noted that Taylor is of the opinion that, if one is to distinguish between actions done by human agents — for example, someone's moving his finger — and those changes and events in the history of a person which are not his actions — including the beating of his heart, the dilating of his pupils, and so on — then this cannot be done solely by reference to the behaviour or, indeed, to assertions about the behaviour. This seems to present a serious problem. However, Taylor supplies a clue concerning how he thinks it is to be solved when he claims that action-statements contain an essential reference to a human agent. On this view, there is a very basic difference between sentences that describe human activities and those that report events happening in or to a person. Now apparently, the difference between the two types of sentences at least partially mirrors a more fundamental cleavage between the kinds of behaviour to which these sentences refer. I speak here of the sentences being a "partial reflection" because, as we have already noted, it is very difficult to separate waking and somnabulistic episodes by appealing in a straight-forward manner to the sentences themselves. At the same time,

the criteria we have discussed so far seem somewhat ambiguous when applied to goings on of such apparently different species as the two in question. In short, our judgment about this and a number of related matters is apt to be clouded unless and until we are able to understand more clearly why reference to an agent is thought to be essential in discourse about actions; but only incidental in talk surrounding other forms of human behaviour.

Taylor points out, and rightly so, that the necessity of the reference has nothing to do with canons of good grammar, nor is it related to the statutes connected with private property (i.e., it was my arm and not Smith's that moved). It has further been argued that this requirement is not the result of observable differences in the behaviour *per se*, since on certain occasions they may very well be identical so far as anyone is able to see — e.g., the attentive and industrious student *vs.* the sleepwalker. Therefore, in order to understand why mention of the agent is essential and what, consequently, provides the basis for distinguishing action and happening, we must abandon our concern with the context and with the behaviour itself. But if we turn our attention away from the behaviour itself and the context in which the behaviour occurs, to what shall we attend in attempting to mark off actions from mere physiological happenings?

In reply to this type of question Taylor says:

> ... every man seems sometimes to know, within himself — independently of any observations of his own behaviour — which motions and changes in his body [he later extends these changes so as to include thoughts] are within his immediate control and which are not. The distinction seems, therefore, to be a clear and obvious one, and yet it is not a distinction in behaviour, but rather in the sources of behaviour.[13]

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[13] Ibid., p. 87.

Therefore, it seems that the principal difference between these two forms of human event is to be found not in the behaviour *per se*; but rather, in the ancestry of the behaviour — in whatever (or whomever) controls the motions and changes that take place. Thus, what necessitates our referring to an agent in our talk about an action is somehow bound up with the genesis of that particular kind of event, and this apparently differs in a fundamental way from the source of that kind of behaviour which cannot be said to be an action.

In order to better understand what Taylor has in mind in speaking about "sources of behaviour" and the intimately related notion of "control", with a view to getting clearer about the basis of his distinction, it will be helpful to begin with an example. Consider a performance of a comparatively sophisticated character such as, for instance, my writing an essay after having spent a considerable portion of the time thinking about it. One of the elements constituative of this rather complex activity might be my taking up a pen to begin the writing of a rough draft. In respect to this particular item of behaviour, Taylor would want to say that it was *within my immediate control* or, equivalently, that whether or not I pick up the pen *is up to me*.[14] In other words, the kind of behaviour of which one's picking up a pen is an instance is just the sort of thing that is up to the agent to do or to decline to do. In the same vane, this point might more fully and precisely be expressed by asserting that; the occurrence or non-occurrence of the various changes and motions involved in the raising of one's arm and hand, along with the upward movement of the

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[14] Ibid., p. 55.

pen are within one's immediate control.

During the period of time which I am engaged in drafting the paper I should not at all be surprised to find myself in an emotional state of anxiety as the deadline for submitting the assignment approaches. As a result of my being in this condition, I may experience indigestion or the occasional shudder, I might find my hands are often damp with perspiration, and so on. The events and changes which take place in my body in the circumstances are not, Taylor would maintain, the sort of thing that are up to me to do. They plainly are not the kind of thing about which one can do anything at all — immediately; they simply occur in spite of my fondest wishes that these symptoms of my emotional distress be eliminated, or at least that their intensity be reduced. Of course, I may manage, eventually, to gain some sort of control over them, but not without having to do something else first — perhaps by drinking a glass of warm milk, or by standing in a hot shower. Nevetheless, it is only by means of such other doings that one may finally succeed in curbing these rather unpleasant goings on. The point is that while these processes may be curtailed or regulated by one's actions they are never brought within one's immediate control by these means.

Taylor maintains that this particular conception of control, likewise, has its place in our discourse concerning the realm of thought. Returning to another element which might have been part of the larger activity above; I may have spent some time thinking about the appropriateness of employing one sentence rather than another for introducing the topic on which I plan to write. In the circumstances, the

episode of thinking which takes place is said to be within my control, in the sense that whether or not I entertain these particular thoughts is up to me. However, not all of one's thoughts (or one's thinking) are of this variety. As the due date draws nearer to hand and my emotional distress grows more pronounced, it is not implausible to suppose that I might fall victim to recurring thoughts concerning the most disagreeable states of affairs, some of which could conceivably materialize upon my turning in an overdue or unsatisfactory essay. For example, I may be "haunted", as it were, by an image of the professor who while scowling contemptuously is shredding my essay into tiny bits. At some stage, after having come to the realization that these thoughts are interferring with my rest, I may try various measures in order to control or put an end to these goings on. Nevertheless, since one is unable to govern their occurrence in any direct manner one must undetake certain other and, thereby, indirect steps with the view to achieving this result. One might, for instance, swallow a sleeping tablet or pay a visit to the professor to talk matters over. The point Taylor is trying to make here is that there is a crucial difference between those specimens of an agent's behaviour which he controls directly and those over which his control is only, and at the very best of times, indirect, and that this distinction applies to thought as well as to actions involving bodily movements.

Apparently there is yet another way in which the idea that certain bodily movements and thoughts are within the control of the agent can be expressed, namely, by saying of these motions and thoughts that they are "voluntary". In this way, the claim that an item of

is within a person's immediate control may also be construed to mean that the *behaviour* in question is "voluntary", as opposed to "involuntary" in the sense of being virtually automatic. Unfortunately, however, the contrast between voluntary and involuntary is a highly ambiguous one. As a result, it must be clarified if we are to avoid confusion at this key point in the discussion. We have already spoken of one use of the contrast between the voluntary and involuntary, but it has another and equally common use. There are certain occasions, especially in legal and moral contexts, where an effort made to distinguish between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' *actions*. In circumstances of this sort, to assert that 'Jones raised his arms involuntarily' is to suggest that his action was done under coercion or some type of provocation — perhaps at the point of a pistol. And, in similar circumstances, to say that 'he raised his arms voluntarily' is to suggest that he acted freely -- in the absence of compulsion or threat.

On the other hand, it is quite a different matter to say that Mr. Brown shuddered involuntarily as he strolled in the frigid night air. This claim carries with it no implication that shuddering is an action done by Brown; instead, it merely suggests that some bodily event has taken place automatically -- as it were, outside the province of Brown's immediate control. In short, this particular instance of shuddering is not something Brown does; it is, by contrast, something that happens to him. Now what must be underscored here is that, when we speak of an item of behaviour's being "voluntary" in the sense that it is "within a person's control", this must be sharply separated from the sense of "voluntary" that borrows its significance

from ethical and legal talk associated with the notions of freedom and responsibility, and so on.

What then can Taylor be taken to mean when he employs the contrast between the voluntary and the involuntary under these circumstances? In this connection he says:

> By a voluntary act I mean only what is done 'on purpose', that is intentionally, deliberately, and so on, and when I speak simply of an act I shall mean exactly the same thing.[15]

It is evident from what he says here that Taylor is using the contrast between what is voluntary and what is involuntary to mark a distinction between two fundamentally different kinds of behaviour. In fact his distinction between voluntary and involuntary (or perhaps non-voluntary) behaviour seems to correspond, almost exactly, with his distinction between actions and mere happenings. Indeed, from what has been said thus far, Taylor seems to be claiming that an action is voluntary behaviour, behaviour that is within a person's immediate control or something that is up to a person to do or decline to do, or something that is done on purpose, intentionally or deliberately, and so on. So far then, his analysis of action involves the citing of a series of expressions which are seemingly synonymous with 'action'. Unfortunately, however, this strategy leaves us very little the wiser when it comes to grappling with the question of how actions are to be distinguished from other forms of human behaviour. Up until now we seem to have been travelling in vicious circles. When we ask 'What is an action?', Taylor seems to reply that it is voluntary behaviour, including thought; and when we inquire 'What is voluntary behaviour?',

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[15] Ibid., p. 61.

we are told that it is behaviour, including thought, that is within our immediate control; and when we raise the same query concerning behaviour that is within our immediate control, and pursue it through a number of additional, intervening stages, we are met, in the final analysis, with the reply — "action". The trouble is that none of these responses serve to throw any additional light on the problem of action, for the simple reason that the contrasts they suggest or imply are at least as obscure as the one they have been invoked to elucidate. Clearly this is anything but a satisfactory account of the distinction between action and happening. Is there no more informative way of explicating the difference between those events in the life of a person that count as his actions and those that do not? Is there nothing more that can be said to shed further light on the issue, beyond the mere uttering of these seemingly empty tautologies?

In order to deal with questions of this kind we must now turn to Taylor's logical starting point. It is here, in my estimation, that one finds the most important contribution made by his theory, *vis-a-vis* those already considered, to our understanding of human action. Taylor outlines his point of departure when he observes that:

> One sometimes has no certain knowledge, when he observes a simple bodily motion on the part of another man, whether that motion was an act of that man, or simply a motion that occurred, caused perhaps by the wind or a moving object. If it is a motion of his own body, however, he usually knows, without being able to say exactly <u>how</u> he knows, whether he made the motion or whether it resulted from some extraneous cause, such as a spasm, a reflex, or an impact with some thing.[16]

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[16] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 7.

Unlike Melden, Peters and Hart, Taylor places fundamental emphasis upon what we characterized earlier as "the agent's point of view", with respect to talk about his behaviour. As I have attempted to argue, the major deficiency in accounts of human behaviour, such as those we examined at some length earlier, is their common assumption that actions must be understood from the perspective of the observer or the spectator, rather from that of the agent or the performer of the action. The upshot of this assumption is that onlookers, rather than the performer, are accorded the seat of final judgment when it comes to describing a person's actions. Taylor's doctrine, suggests that we must give way to the agent as the ultimate authority to whom one, *qua* spectator, can appeal in reference to deciding the question of whether or not the concept of an action is applicable to particular items of his behaviour. To be sure, we have yet to fully appraise his treatment of the matter, but even if we were to reject the remainder of the analysis in its entirety this in itself would in no way diminish the significance of this feature of Taylor's starting point.

Let us now return to the task of trying to get clear about the central elements of Taylor's doctrine in order that we might be able to determine its merits as a solution to the problem of action. Now, according to Taylor, every man seems to know in relation to his own behaviour, without having to resort to observation, which of the changes and events happening in or to him are within his immediate control and which are not. He seeks to elucidate what is involved in our knowing that certain items of our behaviour are "up to us", "within our immediate control" or "voluntary", with the ultimate goal of explicating 'action', by resurrecting the archaic conception of "power".

On his view, the knowledge person's possess relative to their own behaviour consists in the recognition that events like raising one's arm, as opposed to those such as the growth of one's beard, are in one's power; as he puts it, "One can sometimes know perfectly,... that it is up to him, or in his power, to move his finger, and one can sometimes ... know that it is not up to him, ...".[17] It is in this sense that all men are held to know or to understand what it is for something to be within their power. Nevertheless, despite the homeliness of the idea of certain things being; 'in my power', 'up to me', 'within my control' and so on, important questions remain to be answered. 'What does one know when one may be said to know that this is the case?', 'How does one know this?', and, indeed, 'How is one to determine whether the agent does or does not possess this power?'.

Taylor's reply to these questions is that, in spite of the fact that we know what it is for something to be in our power, we cannot say what such knowledge involves or what it consists in. At the same time, while we may be said to have such knowledge we seem unable to identify its source, or its grounds — if any. We can, however, rule it out that this particular sort of knowledge is derived from observing one's own behaviour. Furthermore, Taylor maintains that our inability to be articulate in this regard cannot be taken as disconfirming this thesis. Now, while one might very well admit that these views are not open to outright refutation; yet the point can still be made that the introduction of the concept of 'power' has done nothing to enhance the understanding we had to begin with. Indeed, if such a ploy succeeds in

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[17] Ibid., p. 55.

accomplishing anything at all, it succeeds only in making the issue more obscure rather than in providing us with any additional clarification.

Now these remarks merely represent a preliminary assessment of the view. To render final judgment on this account prior to its being given fuller consideration is tantamount to bringing down a verdict based upon insufficient evidence. At this stage one further avenue remains to be explored. This point, touched on only very briefly before, derives from Taylor's contention that, if one is to distinguish actions from happenings one must, so to speak, trace the behaviour back to its origin or source. He takes the position that whenever we follow a human action back to its wellsprings we will find, without exception, that it will turn out to be the agent himself. On the other hand, when we investigate and subsequently uncover the origin of "mere" behaviour, we will invariably find only various other happenings, but not, under any circumstances, a human agent. To put it another way, the genesis of hiccoughs, shudders, and indeed all behaviour of this species, is always and only certain other events. Taylor suggests that the contrast he has in mind may be expressed in a more familiar way by saying that in reaching for his pipe, for example, the agent is the *cause* of what goes on, happens or takes place; whereas, when a person hiccoughs, or shudders before dropping off to sleep, these and similar episodes of behaviour are not *caused* by the agent; they are, on the contrary, the causal consequences of other events occurring in or to the person. In these latter instances, the *cause* (or *causes*) would seem very likely to

be some sort of physiological change in the organism.

On initial inspection, this thesis might seem to suggest that in actual fact there is very little difference, one of complexity or degree perhaps, between actions done by agents and other instances of human behaviour. That is to say, the distinction between my raising my arm and my arm's going up would appear to rest upon a simple difference in the causal ancestry of the respective events. Yet, this is precisely the doctrine Taylor is seeking to discredit. It is his contention that not only is there a difference in the causes themselves but, most significantly, that there is a fundamental difference — a difference in kind — between the kinds of causality operative in bringing about the two types of behaviour.

The notion of causality ordinarily employed in the physical sciences has to do with a relationship between events. Within this particular conceptual framework, one event, say the waters being heated to 100° C (under conditions of standard pressure, and so on) is said to be the cause of another event, e.g., the waters boiling -- its effect. On the other hand, according to Taylor, the conception of causality germane to our talk about human actions is of a very different sort from that employed in the language of physics and chemistry. It, he believes, " ... has rather the older meaning of the efficacy or power of an agent to produce certain results".[18] Causality of this second species, which seems to have its roots in the thought of Aristotle, and much more recently in that of Thomas Reid, is characterized as "agent causality" so as to distinguish it from "event

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[18] Ibid., p. 112.

causality" (or "efficient causality"). On this view, the human agent has the power to initiate or produce (i.e., 'to cause') changes in himself and his environment, and these changes are brought about or produced every time he acts. Hence, 'agent causation' has to do with a relationship between a person (*qua* agent) and his action, as opposed to 'efficient causation', which picks out a relation between antecedent and consequent events, processes or states. More will be said about these types of causality a little later.

Gradually we begin to see more clearly how this discussion of causality is thought to relate to human behaviour. According to this analysis, there are two conceptions of a 'cause': on the one hand, the notion of a 'final' or a 'first cause' as an *object* or a *thing* which is the *active* agent (or source) of change; and, on the other, the idea of an 'efficient cause' as an *event* which is the *passive* recepient or transmitter of change. Now it is Taylor's contention that taken together these two concepts are sufficient to account for the totality of changes occurring in both animate and inanimate nature. Within the realm of talk about 'human behaviour' broadly conceived (that is to say, those changes and events comprising the history of an individual) these fundamentally different conceptions are presumed to have special application. 'Final causality' or, more to the point in this context, 'agent causality' is appropriate to talk about human activity, whereas 'event causality' is properly employed in conjunction with discourse concerning the remainder of the changes and events occurring in or to the human organism.

That two radically different notions of causality are thought to

be necessary for adequately characterizing a person's behaviour reflects the intimately related idea that there is a correlative difference in the types of behaviour to which each conception is germane. The basic distinction between the two species of behaviour, corresponding to the causal origin of each, is elaborated in Taylor's assertion that:

> When I am thinking or moving my limbs, I am acting — exhibiting agency or active power -- ..., whereas when thoughts are merely occurring to me — as in dreams, or when someone is reading me a story — or when parts of my body are moving in a manner with which I have nothing to do — as in the case of my heart beating in response to internal impulses, or my hair being blown by the wind — I am passive, having something done to me.[19]

It is important note that Taylor approaches his account of human behaviour and, in particular, of the things persons do — their actions, from the point of view of what he terms a "metaphysical analysis of causation". Consequently when he asserts that the difference between 'agent' and 'event causation' and, therefore, between actions and happenings, is an essential one, he means to say that the difference is not merely one of complexity or degree, rather, it is a difference in kind. That is to say, each concept belongs to a fundamentally different form of discourse, or "category", to borrow a more suitable metaphysical term. Moreover, Taylor maintains that 'cause', as it is used in speaking about an agent as the cause of his actions, is the basic sense of cause. In other words, he is claiming that, the concept of agent causality (or equivalently 'agency') and the correlative notion of action are "basic" in the sense that they cannot be analyzed in terms of concepts that are simpler or more readily understood.

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[19] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

Prior to undertaking an examination of the arguments Taylor adduces in support of the "Theory of Agency" and before going on to make a final assessment of his position, let us return to and very briefly deal with the issue, set to one side earlier, which ultimately gave rise to the present discussion. The issue "left hanging fire", so to speak, concerns the question why, on this theory, reference to an agent is deemed necessary in the description of any and all actions. Now it seems that Taylor thinks reference to myself as an agent is essential in the sentence 'I recalled the title to the article' because what the sentence describes is an action of mine. That is to say, in case recalling the title to an article is my act, then reference to myself is essential since, by hypothesis, I am the cause of it. Accordingly, in order to characterize any event as an action, one must necessarily assert that some agent is its cause. It is this element alone that distinguishes talk about actions performed by agents from that having to do with the remainder of human behaviour. In short, it is for this reason that all action descriptions must bear this characteristic ear mark. On the other side of the coin, a statement to the effect that 'the title of the article occurred to me in virtue of some students having mentioned the name of it's author' has me to a very different position. In this instance, I am not active. I am not the cause or source of my being reminded. I am passive. The titles occurring to me is a happening which is triggered or, more precisely, is the causal consequence of another event, namely, the student's uttering the appropriate name. Thus, my recalling something or other, and my being reminded of it are two fundamentally

different kinds of behaviour distinguishable only by reference to the essentially different types of causal relationship involved in the respective occurrences. In short, it is for this reason that action descriptions must, of necessity, contain a reference to an agent.

Let us now examine the arguments brought forward in support of this theory of action. In holding that the agent is the cause of his actions, Taylor is arguing that to seek out some prior event or process, as the cause of any act, is to commit an error of the most fundamental sort. Some philosophers have wanted to maintain that what differentiates actions from other events happening in, or to, a person is that actions are brought about (i.e., efficiently caused) by an antecedent mental state or process. On such a view, the difference between someone's raising their arm to salute the Prime Minister and the rising of his arm, in what to all appearances may be an identical manner, consists in the fact that the former, unlike the latter, is caused by a mental occurrence, namely, a choice, decision, desire, intention, and so on. Perhaps the man salutes in order to show allegiance to his country's government or possibly to gain the attention of an attractive young lady. The rising of his arm, on the other hand, is treated as a straight-forward effect of some change taking place within his body. From his discussion, it is obvious that Taylor believes that the causal analysis of human behaviour constitutes the most formidable opponent standing in the way of establishment of his position. And, accordingly, it is against this doctrine, at least his version of the doctrine he has labelled as the "Volitional Theory", that the bulk of his objections are directed.

The first reason why Taylor is unimpressed by the thesis that acts of will (i.e., volitions) bring about bodily changes, in cases of actions, is that the "theory" is advanced in the absence of any evidence which would tend to substantiate the claim that there, after all, exist such things as volitions.[20] Following Ryle, he argues that whenever a person performs an action he should, if the volitional account were correct, be able to discover not just one but, instead, two distinct events taking place. Depending upon how the thesis is interpreted, he should find himself performing an act of will as well as a bodily action, or he should be aware of a mental change taking place followed by certain motions in his body and limbs. However, neither empirical investigations in psychology, nor indeed the introspective probing of one's own consciousness, have revealed the existence of these separate and antecedent activities or events which purportedly take place in the mind of the agent. In other words, in moving a hand there are not two distinguishable events which happen, or two correlated things one does -- one simply moves one's hand. As a result, Taylor maintains that the notion of an act of will understood as a detachable accompaniment of, and which brings about, bodily movements in the manner prescribed by the volitional doctrine is merely a fiction.

Taylor is persuaded that it is the marriage of two mistaken dogmas that is responsible for leading people, particularly certain philosophers, into talking about volitions as if they were the causes of the things a man does. The first of these is the metaphysical

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[20] Ibid., pp. 66-67.

doctrine of the thorough-going determinist, that every event in nature is caused by a prior event or process.[21] Human actions, accordingly, are construed as changes occurring in a man which are the causal consequence of events of a special order — mental events. The second supposition, which when combined with the first seems to lend a certain credibility to the causal analysis, is embodied in a common tendency displayed by various persons to characterize some actions as "voluntary",i.e., performed willingly. The upshot then is that the supposed "inner causes" inherit a name, which is but one step removed from the conclusion that something exists corresponding to that name. Taylor rejects this notion contending that the ontological predicament of volitions, thus understood, is roughly on a par with that of the Fountain of Youth or the Golden Fleece.

The second argument Taylor advances against the doctrine of volitions fixes on what is viewed the basic incoherence of the attempt at a causal analysis of action. Here again he adopts a line taken earlier by Melden.[22] The point of this contention is that to assert that actions are bodily happenings produced by the internal workings of the mind — intentions, purposes, reasons, etc., — is to completely misunderstand the character of the causal relationship. In the case of a genuine causal connection between events, e.g., between the waters being heated to 100^{o} C and the waters boiling, it is perfectly possible to describe each event independently of the other. In other words,

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[21] Ibid., p. 65.

[22] A.I. Melden, Free Action. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), Chapter IX.

the bond between cause and effect is a purely contingent one. But what is the nature of the relation between intentions or motives, on the one hand, and actions, on the other?

To answer this question consider a case of someone's moving his finger. What can be said about the decision to move the finger without referring to the fingers motion? According to Taylor we cannot describe the supposed cause, i.e., the decision or intention to move the finger, independently of the purported effect, namely, the finger and its motions. Furthermore, the only way in which we are able to differentiate between the intention to move one's index finger and the intention to move one's thumb is by reference to the differing bodily movements in which they allegedly eventuate. That is to say, all that distinguishes the volitions in question is that, in point of fact, they brought about the movements of different fingers. Beyond this, Taylor thinks, nothing more can be said. The problem, in his words, is that:

> ... decisions, choices, desires, tryings, intentions, and the like serve no better than volitions as the causes of actions, and for precisely the same reason — namely, that it is impossible, ..., even to begin to say what these events are without describing them in terms of their alleged effects.[23]

Thus, the link between motives (or volitions) and actions is not contingent; it is, to the contrary, logical of a necessary character. For this reason actions cannot be construed as the causal upshot of inner mental goings on called "volitions", or what not. In brief, he concludes that human actions are never caused, in the sense this doctrine requires, by anything remotely resembling acts of will or volitions.

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[23]Taylor, op. cit., p. 72.

A third complaint Taylor registers against the causal analysis of human behaviour has to do with the voluntary character of a person's actions. Now proponents of the volitional theory would say that what makes an action 'voluntary' is the fact that the bodily change which occurs is brought about by a volition, i.e., one's choice, intention, and so on. In this way, the intention is identified as the internal mental event that causes the motion of one's body. Should the bodily event turn out to be the result of some event other than one occurring in the mind of the agent, then the behaviour in which it does eventuate could not be said to be a case of voluntary action. However, Taylor sees any such analysis of voluntary acts as involving an even more serious difficulty; namely, its having committed the fundamental error of attempting to identify some event, process or state with a human agent. Human agents, he argues, are never identical with events- whether these events are conceived of as either mental or physical changes occurring within them.[24] They are, by contrast, *things*; but unlike the things in inanimate nature, they alone have the "efficacy" or "power" to produce their own actions. Therefore, to single out an inner occurrence, whether it be mental or physiological, and attempt to maintain that it caused the individual's movements is, on his view, tantamount to conceding that whatever took place was no action of his. That is to say, if such events are not caused by the agent himself then, on this hypothesis, he has nothing to do with

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[24] Ibid., pp. 110-111. Taylor takes the same line in Metaphysics, op. cit., pp. 50-51, when he points out that, "When I believe that I have done something, I do believe that it was I who caused it to be done, I who made something happen, and not merely something within me, such as one of my own subjective states, which is not identical with myself".

them — they are indistinguishable from uncontrollable reflexes. Thus, unless the behaviour is caused by the agent or, equivalently, unless it is within his immediate control, the change that does take place must be regarded as an involuntary motion; by reason of the fact that it differs in no significant way from the beating of one's heart or from the jerking of one's knee. In short, it is by appeal to these considerations that Taylor dismisses, or has attempted to dismiss, the causal analysis of voluntary action.

In arguing that mental states cannot be causally linked with actions on the ground that agents, rather than mere events, are properly regarded as the causes of human activity, Taylor is obviously begging the question. Nevertheless, in spite of its logical deficiencies, this particular line of argumentation is instructive. For it does serve to shed light upon the nature of the disparity separating his and the volitional theory and, perhaps, other causal accounts of action. If one grants Taylor's basic assumptions, that actions are caused or initiated by agents and that agent causation is incompatible with event causation, then, of course, this commits one to the denial of the competing metaphysical theses advanced by the staunch determinist, that every event in nature, including human actions, are caused by some prior event or process. In a parallel fashion, Taylor's rival assumption can be stated as follows: some events in nature, in particular some human actions, are not caused (in the ordinary sense of "cause") by prior events or changes; to the contrary, they are caused by human agents. This is not to be construed as meaning that all human behaviour is uncaused (in the sense of "event caused"). In

this context, this would be tantamount to claiming that every item of human behaviour must be understood as the act of some agent, which is plainly ridiculous. What Taylor does defend is the somewhat more restricted view that sometimes persons makes things happen, or bring them about, and that when they originate their behaviour in this way, they are acting, or exercising agency. If true, therefore, this view is sufficient to overthrow the one to which the thorough-going determinist is wed.

By its very nature the disagreement between Taylor and the strict determinist gives rise to special problems. To begin with the respective points of view are fundamentally irreconcilable. That is to say, the truth of one position excludes the possibility that the other may be true as well. In the second place, an advocate of either doctrine may dismiss objections brought against the assumptions underpinning his particular theory as simply being outside the framework. Furthermore, by reason of the fundamental or primitive character of the rival presuppositions, neither may be established nor, indeed, refuted by philosophical argument. Consequently in order to decide between these competing accounts, one must go on to examine these theories, or various versions of these theories, in more detail to determine whether the overall account of action they advance is both clear and coherent, and to discover what the logical (and perhaps the empirical) fruits of endorsing one view over the other might be.

In this connection, it must be stressed that the arguments Taylor employs in his attack on the theory of volitions are not, as we saw in our discussion of Melden's critique of causal theories of

of action, sufficient to show that it is in principle impossible to account for the difference between actions and bodily movements by appealing to event causation. Now, since we have discussed the reasons why these arguments do not show that actions cannot be caused earlier, I shall not repeat them at this stage. The point I want to make here is that because these arguments do not demonstrate that the "Causal Theory of Action" is untenable. the conflict between it and the Theory of Agency remains. And thus if one is to decide between them, further investigations of the kind described above are essential.

With this end in view I want to critically examine Taylor's attempt to propose a solution to the problem of action. It is interesting to observe at the outset that he employs a method of what might best be described as "indirect justification" or "argument" in supporting his account. By the method of indirect justification I mean a tactic or strategy, commonly employed in philosophical discourse, that is designed to protect a certain claim or position by summoning arguments or evidence meant to demonstrate that competing claims are inadequate or indefensible. Unfortunately, this *modus operandi* has a serious limitation. That is, while it may succeed in kindling doubts about the adequacy of rival views, it does nothing directly to bring out the merits of the favoured view. And so it is with many of Taylor's arguments. As a result, it is time we took a closer look at his theory in its own right so that we might determine its merits.

There are it seems to me three main kinds of problem associated with Taylor's version of the Theory of Agency. They have to do with, first, his concepts of agency, a voluntary action, power, and related

notions; second, his view (or views) concerning just what it is that an agent causes when he performs an action; and, third, his as yet unexamined claim that some of our actions may be caused by events. I shall consider each of these points in turn.

At different times Taylor has attempted to explain what he means by a voluntary action by telling us that it is, variously, something that is within the agent's power, something that is withon one's immediate control, something that is "up to the agent" to do or to refrain from doing, and so on. Now, as a basic concept within Taylor's framework, naturally the notion of 'power' cannot be analyzed in terms of concepts yet more fundamental. Nevertheless, he insists that we know or understand what it is for something to be within one's power without being able to say in what it consists. In other words, while we may know it is within our power to do X, or to refrain from doing X, we cannot even begin to answer the questions, 'What does it mean to say that something is within one's power?' and 'How do you know?', except, of course, to say, in reply to the latter that this particular form of knowledge is not the product of observation. But, it seems to me that more can, and must be, said in connection with knowledge of this sort if one is to give a satisfactory account of action. Lack of clarity on this point, it seems to me, is a source of further difficulties at another stage in his analysis. But, in this particular context, the introduction of "power" (and related notions) simply plunges the issue further into darkness in a manner reminiscent of the doctrine of Ethical Institutionism. The difference, being that Taylor, unlike Moore and his followers, seems to have posited the existence of a "power-sense" instead of a "moral-sense" in order to

cover his logical tracks. As a result one is left in the position of having no criteria for judging whether or not something is within the power of an agent. The upshot of his attempt at clarification is that, rather than illuminating 'voluntary action', he has pushed the concept further into obscurity.

The same sort of difficulty crops up as soon as one begins to subject his principal thesis, i.e., that human actions are caused by agents -- not by events -- to closer scrutiny. Now Taylor has gone to considerable lengths to discredit theories in which 'efficient causality' plays any central role in the analysis of 'action'. Nevertheless he then promptly turns around and employs the concept of causality, this time in a radically different sense, in his own account. But what, one wants to inquire, does this accomplish by way of elucidating the problem? To be sure, to say that the agent is the cause of his action serves to draw attention the idea that the connection between an agent and his action is logical as opposed to being contingent. Quite apart from the fact that this kind of talk is, at least, *prime facie*, misleading, Taylor himself admits that it gives us no more information to say 'the agent causes his act' than to say that 'He does it' or 'He performs it'. No additional information is to be gained simply because he views these, and a host of other , expressions as synonymous. In other words, the advantages to be achieved by virtue of adopting this manner of speaking seem to be minimal in terms of its furthering our understanding. Of course, it appears that now we can employ the notion of causality in all our discourse regarding human behaviour. But this, too, is confusing.

The second important source of difficulty in Taylor's talk about the causal efficacy of persons comes to the fore when one attempts to determine precisely what it is the agent causes when he acts. On different occasions he claims, or otherwise implies, that agents variously cause; the bodily motions involved in their acts, their actions, their behaviour and their thinking or thoughts,[25] as well as changes, events, happenings, motions, whatever is being done, and so on. Simply stated the problem derives from Taylor's inability to be clear about the second term in the causal relation expressed by 'the agent causes X'.[26] Clearly, depending on the circumstances,

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[25]"Thus, we can say that I am moving my fingers, but not my heart and the same idea would be suitably expressed by saying that 'I [the agent] cause the motions of my fingers but not those of my heart'." (Ibid., p. 59). Here the implication is that the agent, at least sometimes, causes bodily motions in acting. In another context, he claims that, "If we compare this [a bodily event] with some act, such as the act of moving my hand, then however detailed we make the description, we shall not describe it as an act until we state that some agent has caused it." (Ibid., p. 109). The possibility that agents sometimes cause their own behaviour is implicit in the comment that, " ... a pretended sneeze is an act, and the pretense seems to consist not in a behavioural difference but a difference in how the sneeze is brought about". (Ibid., p. 87). In other words, the two specimens of behaviour may be identical and what distinguishes the contrived from the genuine sneeze is that the behaviours are brought about by causes of distinct kinds, i.e., agents and events respectively. Finally, in his discussion of thought as action, he first points out that, " ... we can say in the case of anything which is an action of mine that I am the cause of it ..." and later, in the same discussion, that " ... my thoughts are not in the ordinary sense things that merely arise and subside in my mind ... they are sometimes acts that I literally perform". (Ibid., p. 154-56). Here the suggestion is that agents, under certain circumstances, may be said to be the cause of their own thoughts or thinking.

[26]For a more detailed discussion of certain of the matters mentioned here see R. Abelson, 'Doing, Causing, and Causing to Do,' Journal of Philosophy, LXVI (1969), pp. 186-92. A similar sort of concern is also expressed in I. Thalberg, 'Do We Cause Our Own Actions?' Analysis, 27 (1967), pp. 196-201. Similar doubts concerning another prominent version of The Theory of Agency, namely that developed by Roderick Chisholm, have been voiced by Donald Davidson in his 'Reply to Comments,' in N. Rescher (ed.), The Logic of Decision and Action (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1967), p. 119.

replacing 'X' with an expression characterizing one of these many different sorts of goings on may create problems of one of two types: first, in a number of instances, the expression substituted into the formula may result in a statement that is just plan false; second, on certain other occasions, the replacement of 'X' by one of these other locutions may fail to preserve the sense of the formula, with the result being that the entire position is rendered incoherent.

These points might best be explained and clarified by means of an illustration. Let us suppose that a man seated at the wheel of his automobile raises his arm, turns the key in the ignition thereby bringing it about that the engine is running. We might further assume that he inadvertently removes his foot from the clutch while the transmission is engaged -- perhaps he is preoccupied by his upcoming appointment with the tenure committee -- whereupon his car rolls ahead a short distance striking another automobile parked immediately in front of it, with the result that the hood on the second car flies up. Now the important question here is 'Which of the events in this sequence are to be counted as acts of the agent and which are not?'. That is to say, 'Which of the actions, changes, motions, and so on comprising this incident are caused by the agent and which are the product of causes of another sort?'. Very likely, if we focus upon the "bodily motions involved in the act", Taylor's response would be that the actions caused by the agent would include his raising his arm, his turning the key, and removing his foot from the clutch pedal. And when we turn our attention to thought, his action may have been one of thinking about his imminent appearance before the committee on tenure.

Nevertheless, it is also true to say that the agent causes, among other things, the engine to be running, the collision between his and another automobile, the hoods flying up on the second vehicle, and so on. Yet at some point, in describing this chain of events, the transition from 'agent' to 'sufficient causation' has got to be made. For surely it is false to say that causing the hood to fly open is his action, or igniting the gasoline in the cylinders is something the agent does.

Even when we confine our search for potential candidates for 'X', in the formula 'the agent causes X', to his behaviour, his bodily motions, his thoughts or, in general, to whatever is being done by him, one ends up in perplexity. Suppose the action is one of 'Smith's raising his arm'; Are we then to take it that, in order to count the event in question as an act, we must, in describing it fully, identify Smith as its cause, in which case our description reads 'Smith causes *his raising* his arm?'. Or perhaps, we are to say 'Smith causes *the raising* of his arm'. Of course, it may well be that Taylor is presuming that we ought properly to associate Smith's agency with the rising of his arm instead of linking it with the raising of his arm. Such a ruling would open up two additional possibilities: i.e., of holding that either 'Smith causes *his* rising of his arm' or alternatively, 'Smith causes *the* rising of his arm' is an appropriate way of characterizing what has transpired. Similar sorts of examples might be generated in the realm of thought, with very much the same result.

At this stage, Taylor may wish to maintain that the issue has become unnecessarily confounded because, in point of fact, 'the raising of an arm' and 'the rising of an arm' amount to nothing more than

alternative descriptions of the same event. Will this stipulation solve the problem? I think not! That is even if we grant this possibility, we are nevertheless left with a choice between 'Smith causes his raising (rising) his arm' and 'Smith causes the raising (rising) of his arm'. By choosing the former, i.e., 'Smith causes his raising (rising) his arm' we render the theory of agency incoherent -- for one of two reasons. In the first place, the formula, as it stands following this particular choice, suggests that agent and action are independently identifiable entities, a suggestion which is manifestly incompatible with Taylor's initial assumptions. Secondly, if an action is characterized as one of 'Smith's causing the motions of his fingers' (Taylor does in fact employ just such an example[27]) then the complete description, citing Smith as the cause of his act -- thus reported, would amount to asserting that, 'Smith causes Smith's causing the motions of his fingers (arm)'. This, however, involves us in an infinite regress. On the other hand, by selecting the latter, i.e., 'Smith causes the raising (rising) of his arm', we once more come face to face with the question "What is to be lost in terms of understanding if we were merely to say 'Smith raised his arm period!'?".

It becomes pretty clear at this point that, despite the deceptive simplicity of the formula 'an agent causes X', in acting, we run into enormous confusion and a host of difficulties when we set about trying to get clear about the sense of this expression. Indeed, a case can be made out for holding that these sorts of problems are due in large measure to Taylor's liberal and undifferentiated use of expressions

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[27] Supra, p. , n. 25.

which he considers to be principal candidates for 'X'. Nor is this an end to the affair.

The third principal source of difficulty in his theory, which is intimately connected with his analysis of 'action' may be seen to have been prompted by the questions 'Can the behaviour of human beings be explained?' and, if indeed it can, 'What form are such explanatory accounts to take?'. Taylor's response to the first of these questions is a qualified "yes"; but it is the nature of his reply to the second that is significant here. Now a detailed examination of the notion of explanation and its connection with human behaviour in general would take us far beyond the scope of the present inquiry. It is for this reason that I shall concentrate only on a very limited aspect of his discussion of the explanation of actions; one I believe to be intimately connected with the question 'what is an action?' and, thereby, with the first element of his doctrine. I shall argue that the view Taylor expresses in this context raises some fundamental questions regarding the sorts of things he seems willing to countenance as cases of action, and that, in consequence, serious doubts can once more be cast upon the adequacy of his treatment of the concept of an 'action'.

With respect to typical instances of involuntary motions that persons undergo including; circulatory and digestive processes, reflex-movements and twitches etc., Taylor adopts the widely held position that they admit of complete explanation in terms of cause and effect. On the other hand, he has taken the position that, when we set about the business of attempting to explain a particular action, we may expect to encounter any one of three distinct possibilities: (1) that

the action was done purposefully (or for a reason) and consequently its explanation consists in citing the agent's purpose; (2) that the action is the effect of prior events and circumstances, and, hence, is explicable in terms of the events which cause it to happen; and (3) that the action was done for no purpose, nor was it caused to occur by antecedent states of affairs, and is, as a result, inexplicable.[28] The first of these, purposeful acts, are of no particular concern here, it being sufficient to note that the connection between purpose and action in these circumstances is held to be a necessary one. Similarly, the third alternative, apparently free (uncaused) and capricious actions, while problematical on other grounds, has no direct bearing upon the present issue. In short, the bone of contention here has specifically to do with the claim that some *actions* are efficiently brought about by prior events.

Taylor thinks that certain actions done by persons can be explained by citing events causally sufficient for the agents doing what he did. However, it seems to me that by adopting this point of view he is bound ultimately to construe some items of human behaviour that are clearly not actions *as if* they were. The upshot of the whole matter is either, that this contention points to additional ambiguity in his treatment of 'action' or that it involves him in further inconsistencies.

According to Taylor, it is possible, given the appropriate circumstances, to explain a man's removing his foot from the clutch pedal (to return to our earlier example) by indicating that the agent was

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[28] Taylor, op. cit., especially Chapter X.

literally *caused* to perform it by one of the following: his being in a state of fear,[29] his being hypnotized to do so,[30] or by various subconscious goings on.[31] At this stage, we may simply inquire 'What distinguishes this occurrence from the man's foot leaving the clutch pedal, due say, to a muscular spasm, or while he is in a stupor brought on perhaps by alcohol, or drugs, or when he is under an anaesthetic or, otherwise, completely oblivious to what is taking place? If we apply the concept of 'action' to the first event, on what grounds are we to refrain from applying it to the second? Are we to say of the first motion that it is voluntary and of the second that it is involuntary? Surely this will not do. For by Taylor's own admission, one cannot avoid performing the former, and thus it becomes indistinguishable from the latter inasmuch as neither are up to the person to do or to refrain from doing. But then if the distinction cannot be made by appealing the criterion of voluntary control, and the cognate notions, of power etc., then from Taylor's point of view at any rate, it is incapable of being made. In consequence, one of two avenues appear open to him here. On the one hand, both events might be understood as actions -- which is preposterous. If, on the other, each is treated as an involuntary motion, then of course what is being explained causally in the first instance is not, as Taylor has assumed, an action after all. (Recall his earlier assertion that by 'act' and

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[29] Ibid., pp. 146-47.

[30] Ibid., p. 114.

[31] Ibid., p. 144.

'voluntary act' he means the same thing.) Hence, pursuing this latter possibility would involve him in a blatant inconsistency. In any event, Taylor's account of action is lacking in sufficient clarity to enable us to decide this matter.

To sum up: the major problem in this context, and indeed the principal difficulty that stalks Taylor throughout his entire analysis, derives directly from the ambiguity surrounding the notions of agent causation, power, voluntary control, and so on. Clearly, it is this that gives rise to the other problems we have just been discussing. Another, and intimately related, difficulty stems from Taylors having neglected to give adequate attention to the significance of the agent's awareness of what he is about, of the agents knowing what he is doing *in* doing whatever he does.[32] Of course, this is a weakness that, far from being peculiar to Taylor's theory of action, tends to typify the great majority of recent work in action theory. In my view, nevertheless, it is his lack of attention to this matter that gives place to much of the unnecessary ambiguity and to certain of the apparent inconsistencies in his position.

On the other side of the ledger, from my point of view the most significant point that Taylor brings out in his analysis is the view that if we are to make headway in our efforts to come to grips with the problem of action, if we are to succeed in getting clearer about

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[32] A similar point is made by D.M. Armstrong, in his "Critical Notice of Taylor's 'Action and Purpose'," in The Australisian Journal of Philosophy, XLIV (1966), when he remarks that Taylor's account " ... casts little light on the close connection between action and information, in particular information about the current state of our body and environment". (p. 234).

how we might distinguish the things a person does from the things that happen to him, we must alot the primary position in our account to the perspective of the agent. In this way, the position of the observer, whether he be looking on from a legal, moral or a scientific point of view, even though pertinent, is at best of secondary importance. That is to say, relative to the agent who performs the action, the spectator is in a less than privileged position in reference to certain essential matters having to do with the appplicability of the concept in particular instances. And this, or so it seems to me, must be reflected in our analysis of the concept. The second important point that arises from Taylor's analysis is that it is perfectly possible to identify and describe some of the actions persons perform without having to resort to using moral and social terms connected with rules of good behaviour. And what this shows is that there is an important distinction to be made between identifying or describing an action on the one hand, and explaining and justifying it, on the other. In short, it seems evident that Taylor regards description as an enterprise which is logically prior to those of explanation and justification -- at least in the realm of human behaviour. In short, in order to justify something a person does, it must be shown that there is a way of describing what transpires that reflects the agent's point of view.

In conclusion: What are we to say of the theories we have examined during the course of this inquiry in relation to the problem of action? Well, to begin with, as I intimated earlier, the complaints raised by Melden and Taylor do not succeed in showing that the distinc-

tion between actions and other forms of human behaviour cannot be made by appeal to events in the causal history of the two kinds of behaviour. Yet, on the other hand, neither do the criticisms raised concerning Taylor's version of the Theory of Agency point to fatal flaws in the kind of programme he has undertaken. For my own part, however, I find the prospect of a theory of action that seeks to identify the differences between "doing" and "happening" by appeal to differences in the sorts of events that bring them about to be the more compelling one -- on intuitive grounds. But, of course, this is no argument. As a result, and in the light of what we have seen in the course of this discussion, the most that can be said is that a great deal remains to be done if we are to gain a better understanding of the very complex issues that underlie the problem of action. At present, we have only begun to scratch the surface.

CHAPTER VII

BEHAVIOUR, ACTION AND EDUCATION

By this point, there are no doubt some who will have begun to wonder why it is that I have not attempted a positive account of my own of the distinction between actions and other forms of human behaviour. To this sort of question the reply is simply to point out that this has not been my purpose in undertaking this line of investigation. As I mentioned earlier, I set about this inquiry with a view to conducting a sympathetic but critical examination of three prominent theories proposed by philosophers who have gone to considerable lengths in grappling with the problems of action. In approaching the subject in this way, I have had two different but closely related ends in view; one of them being more immediate, the other, more long-range. The first and more immediate goal -- which represents the primary purpose of this inquiry -- was to gain a better understanding of the problem of action, of various approaches that have been adopted in trying to come to grips with it, of the difficulties that arise in connection with each of them, and of a number of other, closely related, issues emerging from the study of my main problem. The second and more long-range goal, about which comparatively little has been said thus far, is the one upon which I plan to concentrate in this chapter. It is to determine how far and to what extent this kind of understanding can be brought to bear in order to shed fresh light on, and thereby enable us to gain new

insights into, some of the problems of education.

In Chapter I, I suggested that there were a number of problem areas in education to which an understanding of this sort is particularly germane. These include: educational theory or research, educational policy making, moral education, testing and evaluation, counselling, the evaluation of teachers and of teaching, the preparation of teachers, and the day-to-day activities of practicing teachers. In this Chapter, I shall outline some of the reasons why I think an understanding of the concept of human action and of a number of closely related matters are especially relevant to these fields of educational endeavour. Now for a variety of reasons including; the scope and complexity of the problems I shall be discussing and the remarkable dearth of any systematic philosophical work in the area, what I have to say in sequel, must, of necessity, be merely of an exploratory nature. My aim is simply to mark out areas in which I think fruitful research along these lines can and must be undertaken, and to encourage further discussion about and inquiry into the very rich possibilities open to those concerned with these matters.

How then, and in what ways, can an understanding of human action and an appreciation of some of the very important issues surrounding it, help us to gain some insight into what is going on in education, why, and how we might begin to improve it. Let me begin by making some brief remarks about education. In the first place, 'education' is itself a very ambiguous notion. It may mean any one of at least three different things:

(1) the ends, emotional, intellectual, moral and social, of the educational enterprise. From another point of view, these

ends may be regarded as the qualities that characterize an educated person.

(2) the means employed to achieve these ends, including such processes or activities as teaching, training, learning, etc.

and

(3) the discipline or field of inquiry whose purpose it is to enhance our understanding of these activities and achievements (i.e., educational theory or research).

From this it can be seen that education may be thought of as involving three separate, though intimately related, aspects. Now before considering the contribution that an understanding of the problem of action might conceivably make to these problem areas, including educational theory and research, I want to bring out something of its importance for certain rather more general matters associated with educational activities and achievements, broadly understood.

When we talk about the qualities that characterize the educated person, or the ends of aims to be fostered by means of various educational processes, we tend to separate them into a number of different categories. These categories typically include, belief, knowledge, understanding, skills, habits, values, traits of character of personality, and so on. Interestingly, however, on closer inspection of this list one finds no explicit mention made either of the actions characteristic of an educated person, or of the relationships between these other sorts of qualities (or ends), e.g. knowledge and values, and the actions of those who ultimately come to possess them. In other words, in our talk about different categories of educational achievement, or different kinds of educational goals, there is apparently no provision for actions. Are we to take it from this, therefore, that there is no place in our

concern for the ends of education for talk about action, and, hence, that in our efforts to foster these qualities in persons we have no particular interest in "influencing" their actions? This is a complex and difficult, but very important problem. And I have no intention of going into it in any detail here. Nevertheless, in reply to the first part of the question a number of points can be made. To begin with, I think it is fair to say that as educators we do have a very keen interest in the sorts of things people come to "do" in the long run, as it were, by virtue of their education, and that we do indeed believe that actions represent a very significant dimension of the educated person's achievements. And, of course, this has long been the case. Aristotle, for example, in discussing political science (something he takes to include the art and science of education) makes the point quite explicitly, when he says that the primary aim of this enterprise involves, among other things, making citizens, " ... capable of performing noble actions".[1] Dewey, too, lays considerable stress on the central importance of action in the realm of educational achievements in suggesting that we conceive of education, " ... as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, ...".[2] Here of course the reference to action is implicit. Nevertheless, it becomes explicit the moment we recognize that a disposition is normally understood as a tendency to *act* in certain ways in

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[1]Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, Chapter 9, 1099b; in Richard McKeon (ed.), The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 947.

[2]John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 328.

certain circumstances. Thus, on Dewey's view, in acquiring certain intellectual and emotional dispositions, a person is acquiring, among other things perhaps, tendencies to act intellectually and emotionally. And, even more recently, the role of action in the educated person's "make up" has been underscored by R.S. Peters. In describing the kind of knowledge and understanding that is the hallmark of an educated person, he says that it must be of the sort that influences, "... his general view of the world, his actions within it and his reactions to it ...".[3]

Granting then that the actions of the educated person have long been and continue to be among the central concerns of educators, why is it that there is so little attention paid to action as a category of achievement, on a par with, say, beliefs or values, when talk turns to educational aims or goals? There are it seems to me two closely connected reasons for this. In the first place, there is a tendency to assume that the impact of teaching, learning, and various other educational processes, on the actions that a person may ultimately come to perform in virtue of his involvement in them, is appropriately conceived of as being "indirect". And, there are, at least two important considerations that lead us to think in this way: one of the being psychological, the other moral. The first is the view that, contrary to what certain contemporary behaviourists would seem to suggest, persons cannot be equipped with actions in the way that automobiles can be fitted with spark plugs and water pumps. Actions simply cannot be "bolted on"

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[3] R.S. Peters, 'What is an Educational Process?' in R.S. Peters (ed.), The Concept of Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 9.

from the outside, as it were. On the contrary, we assume that everything a person experiences in the course of being exposed to, or involved in, educational processes and everything he acquires or learns as a result, will always be mediated by his existing conceptual scheme, his purposes and expectations at the time, and so on. And so it is, we believe, with the "acquisition" of actions. Only in the case of actions, we are inclined to make the further assumption that the "route through" to the actual attainment -- viz., to the performance of the desired actions themselves, is longer, more indirect and, consequently, more fraught with hazards than the path to some of these other ends. Accordingly, for such "psychological" reasons we tend to concentrate our energies in working toward other and seemingly more accessible ends, such as knowledge or belief.

There is a second reason for our unwillingness to tamper "directly" with the particular actions that educated persons may ultimately come to perform. It is simply that we are inclined to believe it to be morally objectionable or wrong to equip a person in this way because the type of programming it seems to imply (if this sort of thing is at all possible) would represent a very serious infringement on his personal freedom. As a result, together with Aristotle, Dewey and Peters, we aspire instead to foster an individual's *capacities* for action or his *tendencies* to act in certain ways in certain circumstances. For in doing so, we believe we will be able to preserve the integrity of the individual's choice, and to protect and enhance his capacity for independent judgment in respect of the things he does. In short, it is in the light of considerations like these that educators tend to think

that the most suitable way of influencing the actions of the educated person is an "indirect" one.

But there is, I strongly suspect, a second, and much more fundamental, reason why in our talk about various kinds of educational aims or ends, we make no explicit provision for action and, instead, tend to concentrate more on beliefs, knowledge and understanding, values, and so on. The reason, I submit, is that, although as educators we commonly assume that the beliefs, the knowledge and the values we strive to hand on to our students will have *some* bearing on the things they "do", we simply have no clear conception of how an educated person's actions might be linked up with them. For example, we are largely ignorant of how a sound grasp of certain principles of Elementary Arithmetic or of Newtonian Mechanics might influence the things persons do. We know precious little about what impact an appreciation of the work of certain 20th century Russian novelists or that of certain 19th century British poets might have upon the actions of those who achieve this kind of appreciation. And we are pretty much in the dark about the ways in which someone's knowledge of the antecedents and consequences of the Riel Rebellion might affect their actions, and so on. Now in reply to this there are likely to be some who, while acknowledging that there are indeed rather serious "gaps" in our knowledge concerning the relationship between a person's knowledge, values or understanding on the one hand, and his actions on the other, will be very quick to point out that this "gap" is much less pronounced when it comes to habits and skills. And I think there is a sense in which this point is well taken. Clearly, there is no denying that the connection between a

person's habits or skills and certain of the things he does, as we now understand these notions, is a very intimate one indeed. After all, habits and skills *are* usually analyzed as tendencies to act (or behave) in certain ways in certain circumstances. Nevetheless, this kind of comment misses the point of my present concern entirely. The issues I am raising here -- about the relationship between the beliefs, knowledge, understanding, values, habits and skills, etc., of educated persons and the actions they perform -- is but the tip of a very much larger iceberg. And what lies beneath the surface is a very complicated set of problems having to do with, among other things, the adequacy of our current ways of conceiving of these qualities and of their relationships to action. In other words, I am suggesting that an important part of the explanation for why it is that we have no clear idea of how knowledge, beliefs, values, skills, etc., connect up with actions is to be found in the simple fact that we have no clear idea of what is involved in performing an action! This is not of course to say that there is no work to be done in clarifying the concepts of knowledge, understanding, values, habits, skills, and so on, or in exploring the empirical dimensions of these relationships. On the contrary, a great deal needs to be done in these areas as well -- especially in the light of the growing tendency in educational circles nowadays to place less emphasis on knowledge, understanding and values as products or *things one acquires,* and more upon knowing, understanding and valuing as processes or *things one does.* Rather, my purpose in drawing attention to these significant and yet formidable gaps in our understanding when it comes to educational aims or ends if three-fold. First, it is to raise

some very basic doubts about the ways in which we currently conceive of educational aims or ends. Secondly, I want to call attention to areas in which I think new work needs to be undertaken. And, finally, and most importantly, I have sought to underscore the point that philosophical inquiry into human action can make a vital contribution to our efforts to come to grips with a number of very important problems in this fundamental area of educational concern. And the area *is* fundamental! Because unless we have *some* idea of where we are going in education, we can have *no* idea of what is to be done in order to get there.

Let us now consider how philosophical inquiry into human action can help to better our understanding of the means we employ in our efforts to achieve educational ends -- viz., our understanding of educational processes. I shall begin by making some observations about the general import of this kind of inquiry for educational processes broadly understood and then move on to talk about its bearing on particular problem areas falling under this rubric.

When we turn our attention to the means by which persons achieve educational ends or goals we quite naturally tend to think of teaching and learning. But what sorts of thing are they? How are they related? How, if at all, do they differ from each other and from such other educational processes as; training, conditioning, memorizing, imitation, play, and so on? Let us look first at teaching. What is teaching? What does it mean to say of someone that they are teaching? A number of philosophers who have pioneered the kind of study I am advocating have answered the question in somewhat different ways.

B. O. Smith, one of the first to break ground in this area, maintained that:

> ... teaching consists of a succession of acts by an individual whose purpose is either to show other persons how to do something or to inform them that something is the case.[4]

Later on Smith altered his position somewhat in claiming that:

> ... teaching is a system of actions intended to induce learning.[5]

Israel Scheffer, who has also done some important and influential ground-breaking work in the field, has taken the position that:

> Teaching may be characterized as an activity aimed at the achievement of learning, and practised in such manner as to respect the student's intellectual integrity and capacity for independent judgment.[6]

And, T. F. Green has argued that:

> ... teaching is itself an instance of human action aimed at enhancing the human capacity for action.[7]

And, finally, not so long ago, Paul Hirst provided this analysis of teaching:

> A teaching activity is the activity of a person, A (the teacher), the intention of which is to bring about an activity (learning), by a person, B (the pupil), the intention of which is to achieve

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[4] B.O. Smith, 'On the Anatomy of Teaching,' reprinted in R. Hyman (ed.), Contemporary Thought on Teaching. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 20.

[5] B.O. Smith, 'A Concept of Teaching,' reprinted in R. Hyman (ed.), Ibid., p. 40.

[6] I. Scheffer, 'Three Philosophical Models of Teaching,' in R.S. Peters (ed.), op. cit., p. 40. See also Scheffer's The Language of Education (Springfield, Ill.: Charles Thomas, 1960).

[7] T.F. Green, 'Teaching, Acting and Behaving,' reprinted in R. Hyman (ed.), op. cit., p. 53.

some end-state (e.g., knowing, appreciating) whose object is X (e.g., a belief, attitude, skill).8

From this it is clear that there is pretty general agreement among philosophers of education on the view that teaching can be regarded as either an action or an activity.[9] Beyond this point, however, there is considerable debate and disagreement about what sort of an action or activity teaching is. In other words, the issue of how the analysis of teaching understood as action or activity might most appropriately proceed is a highly controversial matter. Certain writers like Scheffler and Green take the position that teaching is, at least in part, a normative concept. Consequently, they have gone on to try to show how teaching is to be marked off from other, less desirable, ways of "influencing" people, such as brainwashing, bribery, conditioning, coercion, indoctrination, etc. Indeed, although it seems originally to have been an off-shoot of the interest in 'teaching', the topic of indoctrination has recently begun to develop a literature of its own.[10] Others, likewise concerned with giving an account of the generic characteristics of teaching, have maintained that teaching is primarily a descriptive concept. Hence, they have attempted to specify the conditions under which teaching may be said to be an educational process -- on the assumption that the locus of educational value is to be isolated

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[8] P.H. Hirst, 'What is Teaching?' Journal of Curriculum Studies, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1971), p. 12.

[9] For perhaps the most ambitious and thorough-going analysis of teaching as action to date, see J.E. McClellan's, Philosophy of Education (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

[10] Cf. I. Snook (ed.), Concepts of Indoctrination: Philosophical Essays. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

not in particular processes such as teaching but rather in the ends towards which any one of a vareity of processes may be directed.[11] And still others have been more concerned with some of the specifics of the teaching act than with the generic features that mark teaching off from kindred occurrences. Smith, for example, has done a good deal of work with a view to elucidating the logical properties of teachers' verbal actions.[12]

Now, as I remarked earlier, most philosophers tend to agree that teaching, understood as an educational process, is an action that one performs or an activity in which one engages. Whatever disagreements there are between them, centre not on this but on other features of the concept of teaching. At this stage, however, I would like to propose that we begin to seriously reconsider some of these analyses of teaching, especially in the light of recent developments in the philosophy of action. I make this suggestion for a number of reasons. First of all, the vast majority of the work done on the concept of teaching thus far, presupposes an analysis of action (or action concepts) that proceeds along grammatical or quasi-grammatical lines. Here the idea is that by meticulously probing the properties of the relevant English verbs, by systematically classifying and re-classifying these verbs in a variety of ways, and then by assiduously exploring the shades and subleties of difference between members of the various

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[11] Cf. R.S. Peters, op. cit., p. 1.

[12] B.O. Smith and M.O. Meux, A Study of the Logic of Teaching (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962). See also B.O. Smith, M.O. Meux, J. Coombs, G.A. Nuthall and R. Precians, A Study of the Strategies of Teaching (Urbana: Bureau of Educational Research, University of Illinois, 1967).

classes -- all of which has a remarkably Baconian ring to it -- we can begin to eke out a better understanding of what action is and, ultimately one supposes, of what teaching is.[13] And there is no denying that this kind of approach has yielded some important preliminary insights both into 'teaching' and into 'action', as we commonly understand them. Nevertheless, in the last while, very serious doubts have been voiced concerning the ultimate utility of this *modus operandi*[14] -- especially, if what one is seeking is a clear, coherent and comprehensive analysis of human action and, by implication, of teaching. In other words, if it is a matter of some importance to develop a more systematic account of teaching, as I believe it to be, and if there are serious limitations to these grammatical or quasi-grammatical strategies, then this is one very good reason for reconsidering some of these earlier analyses and beginning to explore the possibility of developing a more adequate and defensible account of the nature of teaching -- grounded on a better understanding of human action.

Most accounts of the teaching act accord a prominent role to the concepts of intention, and purpose. To teach, it is often argued, is to do something or to engage in a certain activity with a certain

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[13] John Austin has aptly characterized this way of approaching certain sorts of philosophical problems as "drawing the coverts of the microglot" or as "hounding down the minutae".

[14] See particularly Donald Davidson's, 'The Logical Form of Action Sentences,' in N. Rescher (ed.), The Logic of Decision and Action (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1967), pp. 81-95 and his 'Agency,' in R. Binkley, R. Bronaugh and A. Marras (eds.), Agent, Action and Reason (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 3-25.

intention or purpose in mind. Yet having said this, proponents of these views seem to take it for granted that the concepts of intention and purpose are straight-forward and unproblematic, and moreover, that the connections between intentions and purposes on the one hand, and actions and activities on the other, are crystal clear. This is simply not the case. Interestingly, this sort of difficulty has surfaced as one of the focal points of debate in the controversey surrounding the concept of indoctrination. It centres on the question of whether indoctrination is something that must be done intentionally or of whether, by contrast, it may be done unintentionally. And, there are signs of similar sorts of difficulties elsewhere. Here again I think that we can begin to make important strides in our efforts to disentangle these very complex problems by stepping back from certain of the received views concerning the nature of teaching, indoctrination, and so on, and examining them in the light of some of the recent work in the theory of action -- and, indeed, in the philosophy of mind, more generally understood.

At this stage let me enter a brief caveat so as to avert one kind of misunderstanding that may develop from what I have said. So far it may seem that my interest in re-examining existing analyses of the concept of teaching stems more from a desire to keep abreast of recent developments in certain other branches of philosophical inquiry, e.g., action theory and the philosophy of mind, than it does from a concern for improving our understanding of teaching. In other words, the traffic between the philosophies of mind and action on the one side, and educational theory on the other, may have seemed to this

point to have been all one-way. In replying to this sort of concern, let me just say that I believe that philosophical research in these areas does have much to contribute to the development of this aspect of educational theory. But the converse is also true. The work done by Smith, Scheffler, Green and others represents genuine ground-breaking work not only in the philosophical study of teaching but also in the philosophies of mind and action. In short, as I see it, the relationship between these branches of the philosophical enterprise is not that of host and parasite. Rather it is more like that between two explorers encountering the same terrain for the first time, with somewhat different ends in view but sharing their unique resources. In other words, although I may have been stressing the benefits available to those interested in the analysis of teaching through an acquaintance with recent activities in the philosophy of action, I am equally convinced that philosophers concerned with the theory of human action stand to benefit a good deal through being acquainted with what is going on in the realm of educational theory in general, and in the study of teaching in particular. In short, it is my hope that in the future there will be far more two-way traffic between these two spheres of endeavour than there has been up until now.

Returning to the main point of this discussion: there is a third reason why I would want to urge that we reconsider these pioneering accounts of the nature of teaching. Its roots are to be found neither in the philosophy of action nor in philosophical inquiry into the concept of teaching. Instead, it springs from issues that have emerged in recent empirical research in the area of classroom teaching -- a topic

about which I will have more to say momentarily. At this point, suffice it for me to say that recent developments in this field of inquiry seem to make it imperative that steps be taken to bridge the gap between the high level, generic accounts of teaching offered by philosophers,and the somewhat more down-to-earth and specialized schemes for observing and describing teaching employed by more empirically-minded researchers. That there is such a gap is rather graphically illustrated in the comments of the authors of a very important recent book dealing with "empirical" research on classroom teaching. At one point, in discussing just what it is that is to be studied when one wants to learn something about teaching, they take issue with the analysis of teaching according to which teaching is construed as acting "with the intention that pupils will learn something", partly on the ground that *teachers* often do things with non-learning goals in mind.[15] Clearly, these remarks are meant to kindle doubts about the adequacy of an account of teaching of the sort proposed by Smith, Scheffler, Hirst and others. Later on, however, in outlining some of the "methodological" problems involved in the observation and identification of teaching at the "chalk face", as it were, they raise a somewhat different but related issue:

> There are times, however, when the teacher vacates the centre of the stage and a pupil engages in behaviour which is identical to teaching behaviour -- such as explaining the solution to a mathematical problem with the aid of the chalkboard to the rest of the class with the intention that others should learn. One could ask whether the pupil in question has temporarily "become" the teacher.[16]

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[15] M.J. Dunkin and B.J. Biddle, The Study of Teaching (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), p. 44, note 1.

[16] Ibid., p. 56, emphasis mine.

It seems evident that there is a gap separating the authors' understanding of a philosophical account of the concept of teaching from their understanding of how it might apply to what goes on in classrooms. And this kind of misunderstanding is, regrettably, far from uncommon. Indeed, it is frequently taken for granted that only the things done by persons occupying the social role of teacher count as teaching. But problems arise when it is recognized not only that not every action a teacher performs can count as a teaching act, but also that some of the things that pupils do may involve "behaviour which is identical to teaching behaviour". Obviously other points can be made concerning remarks like these. Nevertheless, my object in referring to them is simply to call attention to the existence of a very important hiatus between the work being done by philosophers and that being done by empirical researchers on the subject of teaching. Now it seems to me that one of the things that needs doing if this gap is to be bridged is for philosophers to reconsider some of the traditional analyses of 'teaching' with a view to elaborating them in such a way as to bring them more clearly into contact with what goes on when the classroom is in session. For it is not at all clear how it is that these high level accounts are to be connected up in an informative and illuminating way with lower level descriptions meant to capture certain of the day-to-day "realities" that represent important slices of classroom life. What, for example, of the pupil who explains the solution of a mathematical problem to his classmates with the primary intention of securing the teacher's approval? Are we to say that he is teaching? Or what about someone who produces an elaborate and well organized pattern of

utterances -- utterances having the "outward" form of questions -- not because he wants the students to answer them, and still less because he intends that they should learn from what he does, but because he believes that this is the sort of thing that teachers do and wants to imitate it in order to gain a passing grade in practice teaching? Is that person teaching? Or to take yet another example, consider the case of a teacher who adjusts the window blinds in order that students seated at the back of the classroom can more readily see something she wrote on the chalkboard during the noon-hour. In adjusting the blinds, is she teaching? And what is to be said of her writing on the chalkboard during the lunch break? Is it or is it not a case of teaching?

Questions like these are meant to put additional pressure on existing analyses of 'teaching' -- as well as, on the underlying concepts of action, activity, intention, purpose and so on, on which they rest -- by pointing out that they turn out to be woefully inadequate when one attempts to apply them to particular occurrences. These weaknesses become very apparent when one tries to link up these accounts with some of the research currently being undertaken with a view to developing a better understanding of classroom teaching. Nevertheless, here once again, I think that recent developments in action theory offer some valuable insights into how we might go about forging a closer connection between the two.

To sum up: in discussing the relevance of action theory for the study of teaching as a process of education I have tried to make four main points. First, most existing accounts of the concept of teaching treat teaching as some kind of action or activity. Second, the views

of action, activity, intention, purpose, and so on, that such accounts typically presuppose are open to serious question on philosophical grounds -- and so, too, for this reason are the corresponding accounts of teaching. Third, these analyses also leave a good deal to be desired when looked at from another point of view; namely, from that of their utility when brought to bear, in the course of empirical research, in an attempt identify particular classroom occurrences or episodes, as instances of teaching or non-teaching. And my fourth point is that, in the light of these and other difficulties, we must begin to take steps towards developing a more adequate and defensible account of teaching as an educational process, and that recent developments in the philosophy of action (and the philosophy of mind) can afford us with valuable insights into how this might be done.

Whether it is claimed that learning is any change in behaviour that results from experience -- as it has been by those with an empiricist perspective, or whether, instead, it is maintained that learning is the acquisition of knowledge through experience -- as it has been by those with a rationalist cast of mind, it seems evident that at some point attention has got to be paid to actions or activities, if anything like an adequate account of human learning is to be provided. Indeed, it can be argued that in any adequate theory of human learning a fundamental role has got to be accorded to the notions of action and activity. And, by the same token, when learning is understood as an educational process -- as a means for the realization of educational aims or ends -- action and activity must play an equally prominent part. Until very recently philosophers have done

precious little work on the topic of learning. Unfortunately, they have done little more in connection with learning as an educational process.[17] And, when it comes to the connections between actions and activities on the one side, and learning construed as a process of education on the other, this is all but virgin turf![18] Given this state of affairs and given, too, the essential importance of learning to education, it is clear that much remains to be done in this area if we are to develop an adequate and defensible theory of education. Furthermore, owing to the intimate connection (or connections) between 'teaching' and 'learning' -- whatever the precise character of this relationship (or these relationships) turns out to be -- any significant advance in one of these areas is likely to contribute to important insights in the other. And in both areas of endeavour philosophical inquiry into human action has a vital role to play.

To this point I have been stressing the contributions that the philosophy of action can make towards the improvement of our over-all

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[17] Valuable examples of exploratory work in this sphere may be found in I. Scheffler's, Conditions of Knowledge (Chicago: Scott-Foresman, 1965), especially Chapter I, in B.P. Komisar's, 'The Non-Science of Learning,' The School Review, Vol. 74, No. 3 (1966), pp. 249-64; in R.F. Dearden's, The Philosophy of Primary Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), especially Chapter 6; and in D.W. Hamlyn's, 'Human Learning,' in S.C. Brown (ed.), The Philosophy of Psychology (London: Macmillan, 1974).

[18] For a brief, preliminary sortie into the realm see R.S. Peters, op. cit., p. 9-16. On the other hand, for a more sustained exploration of the territory which involves, among other things, an attempt to give an account of the relationship between actions and activities, Glenn Langford's, 'The Concept of Education,' in G. Langford and D.J. O'Connor (eds.), New Essays in the Philosophy of Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), especially section III, is a most interesting essay.

understanding of the very complex business of education; of the aims or ends of the enterprise, and of the means of processes involved in realizing those ends. In doing so, I have sought to emphasize some of the ways in which action theory can be of assistance to us in our efforts to develop a clearer, more coherent and more comprehensive ways of thinking about the educational enterprise. In short, I have tried to show the sorts of roles that this form of inquiry can play in our efforts to come up with a more adequate theory of education.

'Educational theory', as I am using the term here, is an activity concerned to inquire into a broad spectrum of educational ends, practices, policies, procedures, doctrines, ideologies, recommendations, and so on, with a view improving our understanding of education so that we may ultimately begin to make more intelligent, more informed and more rational decisions about what we ought to be doing in this sphere. In order to achieve these purposes, we set out to ask and answer at least three different but closely related types of questions about education. First, there are conceptual questions such as 'What is teaching?' or 'What is or what might be meant by teaching?'. Secondly, we sometimes ask questions like 'Ought indoctrination to be regarded as a justifiable educational process?', 'Why should science rather than Latin be taught?', 'Should all youngsters below a certain age be compelled to attend schools?', 'What is good teaching?', and so on. These are normative questions. And, we also ask empirical questions like 'Why do schools tend to be so resistant to various types of educational reform?', 'At what age do most students tend tc have the least difficulty mastering the concept of mass in physics?', 'What is

the most effective strategy for teaching students how to solve simultaneous linear equations?', etc. Now a cursory glance at these examples makes it pretty plain that the dividing lines between these various types of questions are not very sharp at all. Indeed, many of the questions listed here, as well as those I have raised earlier in the Chapter, have conceptual, normative and empirical sides to them. Consequently, it is often as difficult as it is important to separate out these various elements. And, although it is something that frequently goes unnoticed, even today, this is true of a great majority of the important questions that we are concerned to raise in the context of educational theory. In fact, I think it is probably fair to say that the failure both to recognize that very different kinds of questions can be raised about the educational enterprise and to appreciate that in order to answer conceptual, normative and empirical questions very different types of inquiry must be undertaken, are factors which go a good way towards explaining the woolliness of much of what passes for educational theory and research these days.

So far, then, in stressing the relevance of action theory to educational theory I have focussed on certain fundamental educational concepts, such as teaching and learning, and a number of rather broad issues or questions importantly connected with them. In what follows, I plan to consider a variety of more specific questions which arise in a number of problem areas; questions having to do with particular policies, practices, procedures, recommendations and so on, rather than with the over all conceptual framework of educational theory. Many of these issues are multifaceted, in the sense that they have not

only conceptual sides to them but normative and empirical ones as well. As a result, in suggesting that philosophical inquiry into human action can help in sorting them out, I am only claiming that it is relevant to the conceptual side of these problems. In other words, I do not mean to imply that normative and empirical inquiry have no part to play. On the contrary, owing to the complex nature of these issues, it is clear that investigations of all three types are essential if we are to begin to make significant inroads into them. In short, the point I want to make here is that my comments are directed mainly to the conceptual side of these issues; particularly, as they relate to the concept of human action.

The philosophy of action can also make very important contributions to our attempts to come to grips with a wide variety of rather more specialized problem areas in the sphere of education. From among them, I have selected a number that happen to be the centre of a good deal of recent discussion and debate so as to illustrate in somewhat more detail the kind of role that philosophical inquiry into human action can play in educational contexts, and to draw attention to problems on which I think additional philosophical inquiry of this kind can fruitfully be undertaken.

Let us look first at the field of educational research. It has long been assumed by educators, and especially by those involved in educational research, that the proper and, indeed, *the only* route to *bona-fide* knowledge about practical educational matters is through the social sciences. It has been taken for granted that from the careful study of the theories currently accepted in various branches of

anthropology, psychology, sociology, and so on, one could derive, very directly, "implications" that would significantly inform and ultimately reform the business of teaching and learning. I shall call this the "implications model of educational research". Of late, however, an increasing number of voices from this quarter of the educational community can be heard to be raising very serious doubts about the tenability of this view of the nature of educational inquiry, and urging, in consequence, that efforts in this realm be significantly redirected.

What then are some of the main difficulties associated with doing "educational research" in this fashion, viz., according to the "implications model"? In the first place, it is a mistake to suppose that from a statement, or a set of statements, describing how pigeons learn to play ping-pong we can logically derive any conclusions concerning either how children ought to learn, or how they ought to be taught, to play ping-pong -- or anything else for that matter. To make this assumption is to commit the fallacy of supposing that one can deduce recommendations concerning what *ought* to be done from statements about what *is* the case. In other words, this conception of educational research and its contributions to the enterprises of teaching and learning is defective because it confounds normative issues with empirical issues.

But there are other and more fundamental kinds of difficulties inherent in this view of the nature of educational research. In expressing his concern about the dismal state of the art, R.S. Peters alludes to some of these difficulties when he says that:

> One of the things that has depressed me most has been the dearth of limited generalisations established by psychologists in fields

> such as learning, academic motivation and classroom control. And one of the inhibiting factors has surely been the yearning for scientific respectability of psychologists working in this field which they have imbibed from departments of pure psychology. Instead of setting out concretely what needs to be known and trying to devise ways of decreasing our ignorance at the coal face, as it were, they have tried to apply some piece of one of the classical theories in this field and have consequently bored generations of teachers to dearth with these irrelevant pieties. In the field of human learning, for instance, the tendency has been to extrapolate some generalizations taken from Hull or Skinner to fields which, in my view, they have only marginal relevance. No wonder Piaget, who actually did some work on children, is treated as a kind of messiah.19

Now, while Peters has chosen to single out psychology or (or educational psychology) for special attention, it is pretty clear that his comments are meant to apply equally to any of the social sciences that happen, in one form or another, to endorse the "implications model" of educational research. As a way of explicating certain of the difficulties to which Peters refers, let us consider the sorts of assumptions that might be involved in making such "findings" available to those who are preparing to be teachers (experienced teachers would serve as well). Again, I shall use psychology (or educational psychology) merely as an example.

I would venture to suggest that, in the past twenty years so, there are very few students who have taken courses in educational psychology who have not been exposed in one way or another to the works of a parade of eminent psychologists, including the likes of Watson, Thorndike, Guthrie, Tolman, Lewin, Hull, Skinner and, more recently, Piaget. And, doubtless, there were a number of good reasons for putting

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[19] R.S. Peters, 'Chairman's Remarks,' in S.C. Brown (ed.), Philosophy of Psychology (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 58.

those preparing to be teachers in the way of the achievements of these twentieth century giants. Nevertheless, one of them -- which is alive, well, and resident in a good many faculties of education these days, is suspect. It is the idea that by encountering the various theories of learning, developed and defended by these noted psychologists, students will, somehow, learn something about teaching.

But how can this be? That is, if as I suggested earlier we assume that 'teaching' picks out something about the actions or activities of those trying to foster learning, and that 'learning' refers to something about the actions of those "trying to do the learning", then, strictly speaking, it is difficult to understand how, given some information about actions of the one sort, one can draw conclusions actions of the other. There are at least two conditions under it might seem as if we were warranted in "deriving" such conclusions, given evidence of this kind. Unfortunately, however, it should be clear that neither fo them is satisfied by the theories in question. One way of attempting to bridge this gap might be to assume that in actual fact 'teaching' and 'learning' describe or refer to one and the same activity, and, hence that to learn about the one would be to learn about the other. But a little bit of reflection ought to make it obvious that this is not so, even in the case of self-teaching. And, more to the point, this is not at all the sort of thing that the theories in question attempt to account for.

Another way of trying to get around this problem is, *prime facie* at least, somewhat more plausible. It involves assuming that there are laws or generalizations connecting up certain kinds of "learning

events" with certain kinds of "teaching events", such that on coming to know of the occurrence of a learning event of a given sort we would be entitled to infer the occurrence of a teaching event of the relevant sort. But this suggestion, too, is fatuous. For if we were in possession of generalizations or laws of this kind, there would scarcely be any need to expose students to classical theories of learning. Thus, it seems that the attempt to justify putting "teachers-in-training" in the way of theories of learning on the ground that in learning about learning they would thereby, directly or indirectly, be learning about teaching is unsound. In brief, I am maintaining that, since these are theories that purport to account for learning -- an activity that I assume is distinct from teaching, and since at present there are no known connections between a theory of learning and talk about teaching, any move from claims about how learning proceeds to claims about how teaching might proceed can be little more than wild-eyed speculation. And, for similar reasons, those who suppose that inquiry into learning has direct implications for an understanding of teaching are, on the most charitable interpretation of this view of educational research, guilty of unwarranted optimism.

A third and still more fundamental kind of difficulty inherent in the implications model of educational research is one to which Peters alludes in his remarks. It has to do with the fact that the theories under discussion have typically been based on observations (when they have been based on observations at all) of animal learning; particularly, the 'learning' of cats, rats and pidgeons -- with Piaget's studies of children representing a notable exception. In other words,

the problem with using classical theories of learning as a way of trying to understand educationally relevant kinds of learning (and perhaps teaching), is that classical theories represent attempts to account for certain aspects of *animal behaviour;* whereas, as educators, we are concerned to come to grips with a certain range of *human behaviour,* namely, learning, and teaching. And it is far from obvious that, from information concerning how animals 'learn', we can derive conclusions that tell us something about how human beings learn. Indeed, in attempting this inferential leap we run headlong into a welter of fundamental and extremely controversial issues, at least two of which belong to the province of philosophical inquiry into human action. The first of these is the question 'how, if at all, does animal behaviour differ from human behaviour and, in particular, from human actions?'. After having considered at some length the theories proposed by Melden, Hart and Taylor it ought to be clear that there are sufficient difficulties associated simply with trying to get clear about 'human behaviour' in its own right that one ought not to be at all sanguine about claims that take pretty much for granted the transparency of the notion and of its relationships to other, non-human forms of behaviour. Secondly, there is the related problem of whether or not human learning, as a species of behaviour (or action), can be explained in terms of the same sorts of laws and theories that may be involved in explaining animal learning. By virtue of the fact that these and a number of other issues of an equally fundamental sort are far from being resolved -- if in fact they are resolvable at all, it is entirely gratuitious to suppose that learning theory in the

classical tradition has much to teach us about teaching and learning.

So for these three reasons, and others, educational researchers have recently begun to seriously question both the soundness and the value of the implications model of educational inquiry, according to which insights into educationally relevant varieties of teaching and learning are supposed to follow from theories whose primary purpose is to account for non-educational phenomena, as a source of any important knowledge concerning teaching and learning.

Granting then that we are largely ignorant of what does go on at the coal face, the critical question becomes what is to be done in order to remedy this state of affairs? How are we to increase our knowledge in this area? The natural, and I think correct, reply is that if one wants to learn about what is happening at the coal face, one is likely to be far better off going there to find out than remaining at headquarters speculating about these matters, perhaps with the aid of the geologist's preliminary report on rock formations. In other words, if what we seek is a better understanding of teaching and learning, then surely it is not entirely unreasonable to suppose that it might actually be useful to study what teachers and pupils *do* when one sets about the task of getting the other to master certain skills or a particular body of knowledge, and so on. Furthermore, it does not seem any the less unreasonable to think that knowledge of this sort, once acquired, might represent a valuable contribution to educational theory and, ultimately perhaps, even to educational practice.

At any rate, it is in the light of considerations such as these that in the past few years educational researchers have begun to re-

think and re-direct their activities in this realm. One of the more prominent, and I think potentially more promising, developments to emerge from this re-thinking is an enterprise that has come to be variously known as "classroom research", "classroom focused research", or as "classroom observation research". I should like to concentrate on this type of research for a moment because I believe that work done by philosophers on the subject of human action is of particular relevance to this enterprise.

Classroom research, or classroom observation research, is aimed primarily at making sense of and ultimately at coming to understand what is going on at the coal face by garnering first-hand experience "where the action is". Typically this involves going into classrooms, observing and recording (by mechanical and other means) what takes place, and, finally, attempting to explain, or otherwise account for, what has occurred. At present, and in spite of agreement on where the research is to be done, there have begun to emerge two different and apparently conflicting views concerning how it is to be conducted, i.e., concerning the most appropriate strategies to be used in getting at classroom "phenomena".[20] Since the lines of the debate between the two "schools" of classroom research have only just recently begun to surface, I should like to concentrate on but one aspect of this dispute. In doing so my purpose is three-fold: first, I hope to be able to

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[20]For a thorough account of the main features of one brand of classroom research, see M.J. Dunkin and B.J. Biddle, op. cit. For one of the better recent examples of a "new" brand of classroom research, see J. Elliott, 'Developing Hypotheses About Classrooms from Teacher's Practical Constructs An Account of the Work of the Ford Teaching Project,' Interchange, Vol. 7 (1976-77), pp. 2-22.

clarify some of the issues at stake in this controversey by drawing attention to a number of the fundamental questions on which the debate turns; second, I would like to point to areas in which I think further philosophical inquiry, particularly in the realm of action theory, can further our understanding of the controversey; and finally, I want to raise some questions about the potential relevance of these two types of research for both the theory and practice of education.

First, let me begin with a brief description of these two contrasting approaches to the study of classroom teaching and learning. Initially, I will refer to these points of view as "objectivitist" and "subjectivist", though later on I plan to dispense with these terms in favour of what I take to be somewhat more adequate descriptions of these research strategies. Objectivist researchers approach the classroom only after they have taken some decisions about what it is they want to observe on arriving at the scene. These decisions are then normally explicated and formalized in terms of a document, or an "instrument" as some are wont to describe it, which indicates the categories of behaviour relevant to the purposes of those conducting the research. These categories provide the observer(s) with a language, or set of concepts, in terms of which he observes and describes what transpires. Hence, when the objectivist enters the classroom he is already equipped with something like a set of specially tinted spectacles which serve to filter out certain aspects of the activities he encounters, and, at the same time, to throw others into sharper relief. Accordingly, once on the scene, the observer need only don these spectacles in order to begin describing or recording what is taking place.

At this stage a couple of examples of some of the more widely used observation schemes should help to further clarify what has been said thus far. Most of the researchers belonging to the objectivist school have been mainly concerned with the language of the classroom, in particular with the verbal behaviour of teachers and pupils. But owing to differing background committments -- a matter about which I shall say more in a moment -- they have attended to rather different aspects of this behaviour. N.A. Flanders,[21] for example, is interested in the verbal behaviour of the teacher and students because he sees them as contributing significantly to "the climate of the classroom". Accordingly, he divides the verbal behaviour of the teacher ("teacher talk") into seven categories: "accepts feeling", "praises or encourages", "accepts or uses ideas of the student", "asks questions", "lectures", "gives directions", and "criticizes or justifies authority". For the verbal behaviour of students ("student talk"), by contrast, there are two categories: "student talk - reponse", and "student talk - initiation". And finally, there is a kind of "catch-all" category entitled "silence or confusion". Whether the latter is a category of verbal behaviour at all is itself an interesting question, but it is not one to which Flanders seems to have paid any attention. Perhaps, refraining from answering a student's question ("student talk - initiation") is a significant item of teacher talk. In any case, these ten categories represent the total vocabulary to be used in

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[21] See his 'Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitude and Achievement', in R. Hyman (ed.), Teaching: Vantage Points for Study (Philadelphia; J.B. Lippincott, 1968), pp. 251-65, and his Analyzing Teacher Behaviour (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1970).

describing classroom verbal behaviour.

Another classroom observation scheme frequently employed in research into teaching and learning is one developed by Aschner and Gallagher.[22] It, too, focuses on the linguistic activities of the teacher and pupils. But, unlike the one developed by Flanders in order to explore the influence teacher and student talk on classroom climate, its purpose is to examine levels of cognitive functioning as "expressed" in classroom discourse. The main categories involved in this scheme for describing classroom happenings are: "cognitive-memory", "convergent-thinking", "evaluative-thinking", "divergent-thinking", and, finally, there is another catch-all category referred to as "routine". These categories are, in turn, separated into sub-categories to permit a more detailed or fine-grained account of the interaction from this particular perspective.

Now, while for the purposes of illustration I have focused on two of the more commonly used observation schemes, it should be pointed out that within the objectivist research tradition there are at present better than one hundred different schemes of this sort.[23] And, although the vast majority concentrate on the verbal activities of teachers and pupils, they differ considerably among one another in reference to the aspects of these activities they deem most worthy of attention.

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[22] J.J. Gallagher and M.J. Aschner, 'A Preliminary Report on Analyses of Teaching,' in R. Hyman (ed.), Ibid., pp. 118-33.

[23] For a further discussion of these schemes and some of their similarities and differences, see M.J. Dunkin and B.J. Biddle, op. cit., and B. Rosenshine and N. Furst, 'The Use of Direct Observation in the Study Teaching,' in R.M.W. Travers (ed.), Second Handbook of Research on Teaching (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), pp. 122-83.

On the other hand, those I have described as "subjectivist researchers" make their initial sorties into the classroom unequipped with a previously constructed language to be used in describing what goes on.[24] Rather they embark on their research by becoming involved in the activities at the chalk face with a view to gaining some understanding of how those engaged in such activities see what they are doing. The concepts or categories used to describe, and perhaps explain, these activities will be created or generated during the course of the research. As the new categories or concepts emerge, the researchers may make an effort to "check" not only these categories but also the descriptions generated using them with those actually engaged in the activities being studied -- activities which may be verbal or non-verbal, or both.

What then are the primary differences between the classroom research strategies employed by "objectivist researchers" on the one hand, and "subjectivist researchers" on the other? And on what kinds of issues does the emerging debate between these two schools of thought concerning classroom inquiry turn? One obvious difference between them consists in the fact that, whereas the objectivist comes to the classroom already equipped with a specialized language for talking about what is going on, the subjectivist researcher does not. A second difference can be located in the fact that objectivists, by virtue of special prior acquaintance with, and training the use of, a given observation scheme, are the ultimate authorities when it comes to judging how particular classroom events are to be classified or

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[24] J. Elliott, op. cit.

described. An objectivist would not, for example, consult with the teacher to see whether what she was doing could be classified as asscepting feeling, or with a pupil in order to decide whether his reply to a teacher question was an instance of convergent or, instead, of divergent thinking. A "subjectivist researcher", by contrast, may avail himself of the participant's views on the matter in attempting to confirm the description. Indeed, he may go so far as to confer on participants the ultimate authority for judging the appropriateness or suitability of the descriptions provided. Nevertheless, the third, and as I see it, the most important difference between these contrasting approaches to inquiry is to be found in the source of the language and concepts employed in describing what takes place in the classroom. The objectivist comes to the classroom already armed with a prefabricated scheme of concepts for the simple reason that he is merely applying an existing theory in order to describe and explain classroom goings on. The theories deployed by objectivists, whether they be psychological or sociologocial in their focus, have generally been developed in very different contexts and for purposes other than simply understanding teaching and learning as it occurs in classrooms. In fact, in some cases it is far from obvious that the information collected using observation schemes derived from such theories will necessarily tell us anything about teaching or learning -- or any other *educational* activity for that matter. For example, it is not at all clear that certain forms of teacher talk which may profoundly influence classroom climate, such as the uttering of a threat or a deliberate falsehood in order to close down certain lines of inquiry initiated by students,

are to be counted as teaching acts at all, much less as teaching acts directed towards educational ends. In any event, my main point is that objectivists are not primarily engaged in conceptual innovation or in theory development; rather they are involved in theory testing or perhaps, on a minor scale, theory modification.

By contrast, those I have described as having taken a subjectivist point of view with respect to classroom research are concerned to break new ground, to create new concepts and theories to be used in describing and explaining classroom happenings.

When the two research strategies are viewed from this perspective, it is evident that the use of the terms "objectivist" and "subjectivist" to characterize what is distinctive about each is seriously misleading. That is, under normal circumstances, when we say that a particular item of research, or a given form of inquiry, is objective, this may be taken to mean that the claims it embodies are testable in the light of certain publically accepted criteria. But the difficulty here is that this is true not only of the kind research done by those I have described as "objectivists", but also of that done by those I have referred to as "subjectivists". The claims arising out of both forms of inquiry are publically testable, even though the criteria against which their adequacy is judged may differ. But then it is misleading to employ the notions of objectivity and subjetivity as a way of marking what is distinctive about these differing approaches to classroom research.

On the contrary, it seems that in the final analysis the dispute between the two schools of "educational" research can be more informa-

tively treated as a disagreement between, on the one hand, those who advocate *applied research* and, on the other, those who endorse *fundamental research* into educational matters. If we look at applied research in this way, namely as the application of concepts and theories, developed for very different purposes, in order to describe and explain classroom "phenomena", then it seems clear that we are once again concerned with the "implications model" of educational inquiry. Flanders' observation scheme, for example, is a direct descendant of social psychological theory and research concerned with democratic and authoritarian leadership styles and their impact on the social and emotional climate of the group. Here it is assumed that this theory has implications for the classroom in the sense that the concepts it employs can be brought to bear in order to understand classroom activities. And, for similar reasons, the conceptual scheme developed by Aschner and Gallagher can, likewise, be regarded as a case of applied research. They categories they employ in accounting for the verbal activities of teachers and students derive their inspiration from Guilford's work on the structure of the intellect.[25] And the same sorts of points can be made with reference to the great majority of the observation schemes currently employed in the 'on the site' examination of what goes on in classrooms, including those drawn from recent work done in psycho- and socio-linguistic studies which

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[25] J.P. Guilford, 'The Structure of the Intellect,' Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 53 (1956), pp. 267-93.

appear to begin with the language actually used by the participants.[26]

One of the key issues on which supporters of applied research (viz., objectivists) and supporters of fundamental research (subjectivists) are divided is the question of what sorts of concepts or language are appropriate for describing and explaining classroom events. Are we to use conceptual schemes generated in other contexts, e.g., in reference to T-mazes or T groups, and for purposes other than just the study of teaching and learning? Or are we to develop a scheme of concepts that in some sense "fits" the phenomena in the context in which we encounter them? The way in which one answers this question will depend on at least two important considerations: first, on the nature of what it is that is to be classified or described, and second,

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[26]For a discussion of what purports to be a brand of "subjectivist" (or fundamental) research which, nevertheless, bears most of the important ear marks of objectivist (or applied) research, see S. Delamont and D. Hamilton, 'Classroom Research: A Critique and a New Approach,' in M.B. Stubbs and S. Delamont (eds.), Explorations in Classroom Research (New York: John Wiley, 1976), pp. 3-20. V.A. Furlong and A.D. Edwards, 'Language in Classroom Interaction: Theory and Data', Educational Research, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1977), pp. 122-28, have identified three strains of research into classroom activities that have appeared on the educational scene only in the past few years. Interestingly, each of the varieties they mention (i.e., ethnographic, ethnomethodological, and socio-linguistic), although purporting to be more concerned with fundamental research, likewise, seem to exhibit most of the qualities of applied research. One reason for my inclination to regard them as examples of applied research is the assumption they all appear to endorse that human behaviour is invariably governed by certain (primarily social) rules and, in consequence, the task of the researcher is to give an account of classroom activities in terms of those rules -- irrespective of whether participants in those activities are aware of them or not. Recall the points made concerning Melden's view, Supra, Chapter III.

on the purpose (or purposes) for which the research is undertaken. When the dispute between the two schools of research is seen in this light it becomes clear that the disagreement between them does raise issues that are, indeed, fundamental, and that, moreover, are of the sort to which work in the realm of action theory is particularly germane.

In order to further explicate certain features of this aspect of the debate, and some of the very important further questions to which it gives rise, let us begin by considering some of the diverse ways in which a certain classroom episode might be described.

1. 'Certain neurons discharged in T.'s cortex at time T.'
2. 'Certain muscles in T.'s mouth moved at T.'
3. 'T. moved her mouth.'
4. 'T. emitted certain sounds.'
5. 'T. uttered an English sentence.'
6. 'T. said, "The gas in this container expanded because all gases expand when heated".'
7. 'T. explained why the gas expanded.'
8. 'T. stated Boyle's law.'
9. 'T. cited the covering law.'
10. 'T. gave the students the solution to problem 7 on page 247 of the textbook .'
11. 'T. answered the student's question.'
12. 'T. stifled the student's creativity.'
13. 'T. put four students in the back row to sleep.'
14. 'T. impressed the superintendent of schools.'
15. 'T. offended the principal.'

16. 'T. refrained from mumbling as she spoke.'

17. 'T. earned her money.'

18. 'T. taught science between 9:35 and 10:15 a.m.'

19. 'T. lectured.'

20. 'T. occasioned student talk-response.'

21. 'T.'s utterance is a product of convergent-thinking.'

22. 'T.'s utterance prompted divergent thinking on the part of three students in the front row.'

23. 'T. indoctrinated all but seven members of the class.'

24. 'T. fostered conformity to bourgeois norms.'

25. 'T. wasted the student's time.'

From this list it is obvious that there is virtually no limit to the ways in which it is possible to describe classroom happenings. And it is against this background that the issue of how to talk about the things teachers and pupils do, which is one of the central points at issue in this debate, can be seen to take on special significance.

As I remarked earlier, the way in which we attempt to solve this problem will depend upon the nature of what is being described as well as on the purpose(s) for which it is being described. The first consideration leads immediately into the realm of action theory; in particular, into fundamental questions concerned with what an action is, and how actions are to be distinguished from events of other kinds. At this point, I want to raise a series of questions in order to draw attention to some of the issues on which an answer to this question depends, with a view to shedding more light on the debate between fundamental applied researchers.

To begin with, if we examine sentences 1 and 2 we must ask whether talk about neuron firings and muscular movements is to count as talk about actions or, instead, as talk about other forms of human behaviour. In other words, such sentences serve to raise what I referred to in the introduction as the problem of action. Now I think most classroom researchers would agree that they are concerned to study the things that pupils and teachers *do*, not their knee-jerks, sneezes, nervous twitches or digestive processes. Yet having said this, a number of critical problems remain. One of them is, do all of the sentences on our list describe the same event? If not, what is the relationship between the events to which these sentences refer? Another and closely related problem is, are all of these sentences descriptions of the same action? Or to put it another way, how many actions do these sentences pick out? If we assume, for the sake of argument, that while not all of these sentences describe the same event (e.g., some like 'T. put four students in the back row to sleep' appear to refer to consequences and others including 'T's. utterance is a product of convergent thinking' seem to mention antecedents), they, nevertheless, all do describe or refer to the same action, namely, something done by the teacher, then a number of further questions arise.

These new questions have, perhaps, more to do with the sentences themselves than with the events they are used to describe. This is, in itself, a very difficult problem. Assuming that each of these sentences describes something done by the teacher at time T., do they all describe what the teacher did as a teaching act? In other words,

granting that all of the items on the list pick out an action performed by a teacher, can we also assume that they describe her performance as a case of teaching? Another important problem area has to do with the relationships between these descriptions or sentences. Under what circumstances might one of these sentences, or more precisely the proposition it expresses, be treated as equivalent to, or as entailing, another? And under what circumstances would we be justified in concluding that two such descriptions were incompatible with each other.

Another, related series of problems must also be addressed in our attempts to come to grips with this issue. This set may help to shed further light on the dispute between those who advocate different approaches to classroom research. Consider sentences 19 through 24. It seems highly probable that they describe the teacher's behaviour in terms with which the teacher is unfamiliar. That is to say, it is rare for teachers to see what they are doing in terms of the promoting of conformity to bourgeois norms, or in terms of divergent or convergent thinking. Indeed, were it not for specialized training, observers would be unlikely to see classroom transactions in this way either. But, then, if the teacher does not, especially at the time of the performance, see what he is doing in the light of such concepts, a number of other questions arise. First, can an event be described as an action without making reference to the concepts, beliefs, desires or intentions of the agent. A second and intimately related problem is the issue of whether it is possible to describe an event as a teaching act or as a teaching act of a certain sort, e.g.,

as lecturing, or occasioning student talk-response, or citing a covering law, or indoctrinating, unless the agent possesses and is, perhaps, operating on the relevant concepts, beliefs, desires or intentions at the time. R.S. Peters somewhere observes that a child cannot be described as stealing, unless he possesses, among others, the concept of property. And, I am suggesting that similar considerations need to be taken into account when we attempt to come to grips with the problem of how we are to describe or refer to the things that teachers and students do. It may well be, just as in the case of the child who "walks off" with his playmate's wagon, that it is a mistake to suppose that teachers can be said to be engaged in an action described as 'thinking convergently' or 'citing a covering law' unless they have some idea of what would be involved in acting in this way. And obviously the same sort of point can of course be raised in connection with the activities of pupils. Now surely these kinds of issues are precisely what is at stake when the fundamental researcher insists that it is important to describe the activities occurring in classrooms in ways that are familiar to participants; that represent the ways in which the participants conceive of what they are doing. Here, then, it can be seen that the dispute turns on a number of fundamental issues relating to the nature of human action and to the broader concerns of action theory.

On the other hand, in determining what sorts of concepts or language are appropriately used in describing (amd explaining) what transpires in classrooms, we must also consider the purposes for which such inquiries are undertaken. Now, while this is something

that is difficult to determine with reference to particular examples of research, because the researchers themselves are often not clear about the point of the enterprise, there do, nevertheless, seem to be at least three sorts of reasons for carrying out investigations of this kind. Some are conducted simply in order to provide a biography or, perhaps, a kind of natural history, of a particular classroom (or classrooms); others are pursued mainly to widen the compass of, or to further test, some theory developed in the social sciences to explain all human behaviour or certain very broad classes of behaviour, e.g., cognitive "behaviour" or leadership behaviour, of which the classroom activities of teachers and pupils are seen to be a sub-class; and still others are carried out with a view to understanding teaching "in its own right", or to developing a theory or teaching or a theory of teaching-learning..

This brings me to the final set of questions I want to raise in reference to the work currently being done under the aegis of classroom research. These questions are meant to help us get clearer about the relevance, or potential relevance, of this enterprise for the theory and practice of education.

Now if, as I have been maintaining, we can only begin to come to grips with the problem of how we are to classify or describe (and perhaps explain) what goes on in classrooms by considering not only the nature of what it is we wish to describe but also the purposes for which we wish to describe it, then, obviously it is crucial that we attempt to get clearer about the purposes of classroom research. In discussing this aspect of the problem I shall concentrate on the

research done by those whose foremost concern lies in developing a theory of teaching, leaving aside the research activitites of those whose primary aim seems to be biography or natural history. At this stage, let us inquire into the sorts of "further" purposes there may be for developing a theory of teaching. This question is an important one mainly because, although it is commonly supposed that a theory of this sort would be a good thing, advocates seldom trouble to make clear what the point of such a theory might be vis-a-vis the theory and practice of education. Thus, on the assumption that a theory (or perhaps theories) of teaching is possible, let us inquire into what their point or purpose might be. Now it seems to me that, by considering the uses to which such a theory might be put, we can distinguish at least two main reasons for attempting to develop a theory of teaching. One of them, about which I have spoken already, is to understand the classroom activities of pupils and teachers as an instance of some broader class of human behaviour. With this end in view, certain researchers set out to describe and explain classroom occurrences as some sort of social or cultural phenomenon, for example, as an instance of socialization or enculturation. Others, by contrast, are concerned to examine and account for these activities from a psychological perspective, e.g., as the unfolding of immanent cognitive structures, as a form of operant conditioning, or as involving achievement motivation, and so on. Yet, since the primary function of these theories is to add to the corpus of theory in the social sciences, it is a nice question as to whether they have any educational import, and, if so, under what circumstances this might be the case. A second kind

of purpose for developing a theory of teaching is one that seems to bear more directly on the practical concerns of those on the "inside" of the educational enterprise. That is, it might be used to initiate new-comers into teaching or to improve the practice of those already in the field. Now, I am not suggesting that these are the only reasons why people have from time to time thought it desirable to attempt to generate a theory of teaching (or teaching-learning). I am simply claiming that these are among the most common answers to the question 'Why is it important or desirable to develop a theory of teaching?'.

In this connection, then, I should like to raise a series of questions in the hope that by doing so I can encourage further discussion, inquiry, and debate in reference to these much neglected but, nevertheless, very important issues. Now, as we saw earlier, it seems plausible to assume that a single action can be described or referred to in many different ways. If this is so, a number of important questions must be addressed by those who would construct a theory of teaching. To begin with, what kinds of descriptions are likely to be most useful to researchers whose foremost aim is to contribute to the body of theory in the social sciences? For example, would different social science disciplines, or different areas of specialization within a given discipline, require distinctive vocabularies for describing the things pupils and teacher do? Or, is it possible that they might all be able to employ the same sorts of concepts or language for describing what goes on? And, what of the problem of explanation? At present, it is evident that there are some rather radical differences in the explanatory concepts employed by different disciplines, or even

by different areas of specialization within a particular discipline. Yet, for all that, it might be asked whether or not these various forms of inquiry might begin from a common descriptive vocabulary.

And when we turn to consider the efforts of those striving to come up with a theory of teaching that will be of most use to those on the "inside" of the educational enterprise, similar questions must also be raised. What kinds of descriptions of classroom doings are most likely to enhance the understanding, and perhaps the practice, of those being initiated into, or those currently involved in, teaching? For example, would descriptions that portray a teacher's activities through his own eyes, the eyes of other participants, or the eyes of the specialized vocabulary currently used in various social sciences, be likely to be most useful in this respect? Might there be important differences in the kinds of descriptive language that initiates and "experienced" teachers, respectively, find most useful in understanding what goes on in classrooms? These questions, too, must be taken into account in attempting to determine the most appropriate ways of classifying or describing the activitires of teachers and students as they occur in classrooms, and, hence, in trying to sort out the dispute between the two schools of thought concerning classroom research. Many of these questions I realize are primarily normative or empirical rather than conceptual; but that in no way lessens their importance for educational theory and practice, which is one of my main concerns here.

To summarize this part of the discussion: I have attempted to show, by considering a newly emerging type of research into the

activities associated with teaching and learning, that the kinds of problems of concern to those engaged in philosophical inquiry into human action are also central to the concerns of those carrying out classroom research and, moreover, that philosophical work done in this sphere can be used to shed light on, and thereby yield some very important insights into, this problem area. In this context, I have confined my remarks to issues related to the behaviour/action distinction and to certain of the problems associated with describing actions. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that philosophical work done on the explanation of action, and on the more general topic of the nature of the social sciences are also matters that are particularly relevant to the concerns of those involved in the study of what goes on in classrooms. In my view, some understanding of these underlying issues is an absolutely essential prerequisite of any attempt to develop more plausible, significant and defensible accounts of the activities of teachers and students. Up until now, the vast majority of work done in this sphere has been very primitive -- bordering at times on the Neanderthal. My objective in drawing attention to the relevance of action-theory to the problem area and in raising further questions with respect to it, has been to make the case that the philosophy of action has some very important things to say to educational researchers -- things of fundamental importance in reference to certain problems they now face -- and to suggest further lines of investigation and inquiry in this realm.

Now because I have spent considerable time talking about the relevance of action-theory to educational theory and research, and

because of the limits of this essay, I shall make only some very brief remarks about what I see to be the import of philosophical inquiry into action for certain other problem areas in education.

Let me begin my discussion of the relevance of the philosophy of action to these other problem areas by considering educational policy making. In this realm these days, one commonly encounters considerable discussion and debate surrounding such issues as: whether the school leaving age ought to be lowered, whether teachers and schools ought to be accountable to the public (taxpayers) for producing or failing to produce the "results" they are supposed to produce, whether all students ought to be required to master certain "basic" skills, whether certain interest groups in the community, e.g., members of the women's liberation or gay liberation movements, members of ethnic or racial minorities or representatives of the pro-and-anti abortion movements, etc., ought to be allowed access to the classroom, and so on. All of these issues can be regarded as matters of educational policy in the sense that, in attempting to answer the questions they raise, one must take a stand, render a verdict, or make a judgment of value concerning what is worth doing from an educational point of view. In other words, each of them can be seen to be a question of the form 'what ought to be done?' or 'what would it be worth doing from an educational point of view?'. Of course, in this respect, decisions on matters of policy are indistinguishable from other decisions on practical educational matters, such as Miss Jones' decision not to use multiple choice questions on the final examination, or to assign eight questions for homework, or to teach the optional unit on moral

problems in her biology course, and so on. How, then, do decisions with respect to matters of policy differ from decisions with respect to matters of these other kinds? Roughly speaking, the difference between policy decisions and educational decisions of other sorts seems to go something like this: the rules involved in matters of policy have to do with the official practices (classes of actions, or activities) of educational institutions rather than with the particular, and informal ("unofficial") activities of persons associated with those institutions. At all events, my primary concern here is to demonstrate the bearing of philosophical inquiry into human actions upon the enterprise of making educational policy. In order to bring this out, let us consider a particularly important species of policy decision; namely, decisions concerning what teachers ought to teach and what students ought to learn. In other words, decisions about curriculum.

Now for those committed to developing rational educational policy, one of the thorniest issues in education is the problem of justifying the teaching of one thing rather than another. Why, for example, ought students be required to learn French rather than, say, Latin or Ukrainian? or why ought high school students of physics be taught mechanics rather than astro-physics or meterology? In this connection, some contemporary philosophers of education have argued R.S. Peters[26] quite directly and Israel Scheffler [27] somewhat more

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[26]R.S. Peters, Ethics and Education (Chicago: Scott-Foresman, 1967), see especially Chapter Four.

[27]I. Scheffler, 'Justifying Curriculum Decisions,' in I. Scheffler, Reason and Teaching (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973).

indirectly -- that this justification must come from a conception of 'worthwhile activities'. But a discussion of worthwhile activities inevitably boils down to the concept of 'reasons for action'. And, at this point, one encounters an especially complex and troublesome notion, depending as it does upon a number of very complicated problems related to the *explanation* of actions and their *justification*, as well as upon such other, more fundamental issues, as the nature of actions, activities and practices, and of how they are to be described. Of course, I am suggesting that this is true not only of decisions about curriculum, but also of decisions concerning other matters of educational policy. In short, before we learn to apply the complex concept of 'reasons for action' we must be pretty clear about what is involved in performing an action, and in engaging in an activity or a practice, as well as about how actions, activities and practices are appropriately described from an educational point of view. In many of these areas, the tendency so far has been to put the cart before the horse. What I am proposing, then, is that the kinds of issues pursued by philosophers engaged in inquiry into human action are of fundamental importance to educators concerned to better understand what is going on in the realm of educational policy making and why.

One of the primary goals of education is the development of certain moral qualities in the young. Until quite recently, the tendency among North American educators has been to ignore the moral side of education, assuming either that the fostering of these qualities was the proper responsibility of the home, the church, or some

other social institution or else that such qualities would be picked up quite naturally, possibly by osmosis, in the course of studying art, literature, history, music, and so on. In the past few years, however, an increasing number of educators have begun to argue that to approach the transmission or fostering of moral qualities in either of these ways is tantamount to leaving this fundamental aspect of education to chance or good fortune. Consequently, they have gone on to urge that explicit measures be taken in order to ensure that schools and teachers take up their proper responsibilities in this domain. Under this aegis, there has in the past ten or so years been a great deal of work done in reference not only to the aims or ends of moral education, but also to the means or strategies to be employed in trying to realize these ends. At any rate, out of these efforts there has emerged what is perhaps best described as a 'problem area' within educational theory and practice, a problem area that has come to be known as 'Moral Education' or, more generally, as 'Values Education'. It is in reference to this particular enterprise, as well as to moral education more broadly understood, that I am suggesting that philosophical inquiry, particularly into the concept of action, is especially germane.

Consider first the aims or ends of moral education. Surely one of the central objectives of this activity is to enable a person to become a moral agent, to adopt a moral point of view in their dealings with other persons, or to become capable of participating in a moral form of life. In order to accomplish this end, it seems necessary that the young person acquire the sorts of concepts, beliefs and understand-

ing that enable him to see and reason about his own actions, and those of others, in moral terms. But what is involved not only in *seeing and reasoning about*, but also *coming to see and reason about* actions from a moral point of view? This is an extremely difficult question. Nevertheless, it is a problem to which work in the realm of action theory, in particular what has been done in connection with the nature of action and the description of action, can make a significant contributions.

Obviously, it is not sufficient for someone to be a moral agent that they merely acquire the concepts, beliefs and so on, that enable them to understand and reason about actions in moral terms. At best, this would do no more than equip them to be spectators to the moral scene. Hence, to leave matters at this point would be ignore the very heart of morality and, *a fortiori*, of moral agency; namely *moral action*. Learning to be a moral agent then involves, among other things, not only the acquisition of the relevant concepts and beliefs, together with the development of the capacity to reason about moral affairs, but also the capacity and willingness to "translate" these into moral action through the exercise of moral agency. And here, once again, we run headlong into a number of extremely perplexing problems, many of which fall within the purview of the philosophy of action. For example, there are fundamental conceptual questions having to do with the nature of human agency and action (moral and otherwise), and there are problems concerning the relationship between conceiving of and reasoning about actions in moral terms, on the one hand, and acting morally, on the other. In the latter

case, we need to learn a great deal more about the connection between the possession of moral concepts and the ability to engage in moral action in general, as well as, about the relationship between the possession of particular moral concepts, say, those of stealing or promising, and the ability to engage in certain types of morally relevant actions. Clearly, each of these issues hinge in important ways on problems that can be significantly illuminated by philosophical inquiry into human action. So, it is evident that philosophical inquiry into human action addresses issues that are vital to work of those who are concerned with the aims or ends of moral education.

And when we turn our attention to the means or strategies to be used in enabling young persons to become moral agents, similar points concerning the relevance of action theory can also be made. One important problem area in this realm has to do with the kinds of actions or activities that it is appropriate for the teacher to engage in with a view to enabling students to become moral agents. It has been argued that one of the more effective means for achieving this end is indoctrination, yet because indoctrination is thought to be immoral, this view is held to lead to the paradoxical result that one of the more effective means of moral education is, itself, immoral.[28] While this argument raises a number of important issues that require considerable sorting out and clarifying, one of them centres around

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[28] J.E. McClellan, op. cit., pp. 156-59, phrases the paradox in roughly this form. R.S. Peters in his 'Reason and Habit: The Paradox of Moral Education', reprinted in I. Scheffler (ed.), Philosophy and Education 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1966), pp. 245-62. casts the paradox in more general terms, avoiding specific reference to indoctrination.

the concept of indoctrination — a topic about which I raised a number of questions earlier in this discussion. In this context, let us focus on the notion of indoctrination itself. Now, in spite of the fact that this is a very controversial topic, participants in the controversey normally tend to agree that indoctrinating is *something a teacher does* — whatever else may be said about it. In other words, the participants in this dispute seem to agree, if they agree on nothing else, that indoctrination or indoctrinating, picks out something done by, for example, a teacher. Against this background, if we allow, as I suggested earlier, that a given action can be described in many different ways, then one way of reformulating certain aspects of this problem would be to inquire, 'Under what kinds of descriptions may a teacher be said to be indoctrinating someone?'. This reformulation has the virtue, or so it seems to me, of drawing attention to some of the hidden complexities of this problem, especially when it comes to identifying particular cases of indoctrination. In particular, it serves to kindle serious doubts about analyses of the concept which seem committed to the view that some *one* intention, method, or upshot will be perfectly obvious to all concerned in every instance of indoctrination. Such issues derive from that branch of action theory concerned with the problem of describing actions. Another issue that emerges, likewise, from action theory, is the question of whether a teacher who *refrains* from providing the grounds for a certain set of beliefs — e.g. for the truth of the ten-times table, or for Newton's three laws of motion, can be said to be indoctrinating her students when she gets them to learn these things? In other words, can refrain-

ing from providing the students with the relevant information or evidence be counted as something the teacher does — an action she performs? And, furthermore, can this kind of doing, if indeed it is one, be counted as indoctrination? My point here is that throughout the debate on indoctrination there is a considerable lack of clarity on, among others, the issue of just what sort of doing or action indoctrinating might be. Is it a particular action, a series of actions, an activity, a practice, a case of refraining, or a failure to act, or perhaps some of these done in a certain way, or done with a certain upshot, and so on? Once again, it should be clear that important problems concerning the proper means to be used in moral education involve issues of interest to philosophers working in the field of human action, and that a better grasp of matters of educational concern requires a deeper appreciation of these issues.

Developments that have taken place during the past fifteen years or so within one of educations perennial problem areas, namely, the enterprise of evaluation and testing, have served to bring some of the very complex and difficult problems in this domain into much more direct and obvious contact with the sorts of issues that fall under the rubric of action theory. Let us consider briefly how this has happened.

Certain reformers, despairing of the ambiguity or vagueness surrounding the terms typically employed by practicing educators in characterizing the ends towards which their efforts and activities are directed, or in describing various categories of educational achievement, have sought to encourage them to "clean up" (or clear up) their

act. They have argued, and quite rightly I believe, that certain, and perhaps many, of the difficulties that arise in educational practice, especially in connection with testing and evaluation, can be traced to the general woolliness, or lack of clarity, characteristic of the language educators use in talking about their aims, ends, goals or objectives. If teachers were clearer about their objectives, it is reasoned, then many of the doubts and anxieties commonly associated with determining how far and to what extent they had achieved these ends would be reduced considerably -- if not eliminated entirely. In other words, the point is that if one is clear about where one is headed, then surely one will be in a far better position not only to decide how to get there, but also to determine whether they have arrived. But how is the intellectual fog which allegedly beclouds the thinking and judgment of well intentioned educators to be dissipated? How do we come to grips with this problem?

On the supposition that the confusion surrounding this enterprise stems mainly from educator's reliance upon such terms as 'appreciation', 'attitude', 'belief', 'citizenship', 'creativity', 'critical thinking', 'knowledge', 'understanding', 'value', and so on, reformers maintain that the answer or solution lies in banishing these terms from the realm of educational discourse -- save perhaps for those occasions on which the expression of sentiment is the primary order of business -- on the grounds that they are ambiguous, vague, nebulous or, even meaningless. Based on this perspicacious analysis of the root of the problem and out of a desire to inject at least a small dose of scientific rigour and respectability into what otherwise appeared to

be a normative *cum* metaphysical wasteland, reformers have taken to urging educators to state or specify their objectives in "behavioural terms".[29] In other words, it seems to have been taken for granted that the only way in which we can get clearer about educational ends or objectives, particularly for the purposes of testing and evaluation, is to do away with "non-behavioural" terms and replace them with behavioural terms, when as educators, we begin to talk seriously about what we are trying to achieve.

Now, as is well known, this proposal has been assailed on a wide variety of grounds.[30] Some have attacked it because it seems to presuppose a behaviourist theory of learning which is itself defective; others have charged that, if adopted, it would impose needless, or perhaps unjustifiable, constraints on the activities of teaching and learning; others have claimed that it lacks feasibility; others have criticized it because it is based on a stone-age epistemology; and still others have maintained that it is wrongheaded, since the theory of meaning (viz., that the meaning of an expression is what it refers

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[29]For typical statements of this position see R.F. Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives (Palo Alto, Calif.: Fearon, 1962), W.J. Popham and E.L. Baker, Systematic Instruction (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970) and R.M. Gagne, 'Behavioural Objectives? Yes!' reprinted in J.M. Rich (ed.), Innovations in Education: Reformers and Their Critics (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975), pp. 207-11.

[30]For some of these criticisms see J.M. Atkin, 'Behavioural Objectives in Curriculum Design: A Cautionary Note,' The Science Teacher, (May, 1968), E.W. Eisner, 'Educational Objectives: Help or Hindrance,' School Review , Vol. 75 (1967), G.F. Kneller, 'Behavioural Objectives? No!' reprinted in J.M. Rich (ed.), Ibid., pp. 212-17, G.J. Posner and K.A. Strike, 'Ideology vs. Technology: The Bias of Behavioural Objectives,' Educational Technology (May, 1975), pp. 28-34, and H.D. Simons, 'Behavioural Objectives: A False Hope for Education,' The Elementary School Journal (January 1973), pp. 173-81.

to or, more simply, that meaning is naming) on which it depends is wrongheaded. And so on.

Yet, all of these criticisms seem to presuppose that the proposal is clear, that there are few, if any, difficulties involved in determining what it means. But is this the case? What precisely is a behavioural objective? And how do behavioural objectives differ from non-behavioural objectives? In attempting to respond to this critical question, proponents of this doctrine have tended to adopt a number of different strategies, no one of which, I would wish to maintain, is at all satisfactory given their avowed ambitions. One strategy is to prepare two lists of items. The first list typically consists of terms like 'identify', 'define', 'describe', 'solve', 'manipulate', 'classify', and so on, which are mysteriously, and without explanation, given the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. The second list is composed of such terms as 'believe', 'know', 'understand', and 'appreciate' and so on. These, and all other terms like them, it is implied, are to be treated as if they were "black-listed" or perhaps "taboo" -- again without any explanation of what the relevant principle(s) of sameness or difference might be. The second type of strategy is somewhat more enlightened, if not more enlightening. It consists of retaining the lists, but attempting to explain why the terms are classified as they are. That is, some proponents of behavioural objectives have attempted to spell out the basis on which they have distinguished terms of the one sort from terms of the other. And, this is the point at which matters become interesting and, at the same time, where fundamental issues in the

philosophy of action must be brought into consideration. For what the reformers are apparently seeking is a criterion that will help us to distinguish terms that refer to behaviour (and, in some cases, its products) from terms that do not. And in so doing they are lead directly into the domain of fundamental issues concerning the nature of human action and its description.

Efforts to elicit criteria that would enable them at least to preserve their impoverished list and, perhaps, to extend it modestly, have been at best feeble, and simply will not do. Gestures in the direction of a clear and servicable criterion have been made by appealing to such considerations as whether the statement describing the objective is; a statement containing a verb, or a statement containing an action verb, a statement containing a "behavioural verb", or a statement which says what the learner will be *doing*, or a statement which describes or refers to outward or observable behaviour, etc.,as criteria of demarcation. Unfortunately, however, a little reflection makes it clear that none of these explications can be employed as a criterion that will assist in preserving the original lists, much less in extending them along lines that are informative. They provide no clear, precise, and unambiguous specification of the relevant terms, either because they make unwarranted assumptions about the clarity of certain distinctions enshrined within traditional English grammar (e.g., between verbs that signify states of beings vs. verbs that signify action, between sentences in the passive and sentences in the active voice) or because they, unjustifiably, assume that there is a clear distinction between descriptions of behaviour

(action) and descriptions of other human events, or simply because they beg the question (by taking it for granted that verbs are "behavioural verbs" just in case they describe or refer to behaviour).

In short, when the recommendation that educational objectives be stated in behavioural terms is subjected to critical scrutiny, it turns out to be based on views of the nature of human action and of the language we use in describing or referring to actions that are extraordinarily muddled. This surely is an ironical turn of events, given the announced ambitions of those, who in making this recommendation would have educators clear up their thinking in the realm of testing and evaluation. This result is important, too, in another way. For it clearly demonstrates the relevance of philosophical inquiry into matters of human action to this problem area. In this context, these issues are fundamental, since unless and until we are a good deal clearer about what is to count as behaviour and, hence, as a behavioural objective, we cannot begin to appraise the other objections that have been raised in reference to this doctrine. In other words, we cannot begin to decide whether this proposal, or the standard objections to it, are sound until we know what is being talked about, or what the proposal means!

Counselling, the evaluation of teaching, teacher preparation, as well as the day-to-day activities of classroom teacher are also enterprises involving issues that link up in important ways with problems in the realm of action theory. One of the so-called techniques that has lately been introduced into the repertoires of school counsellors is something called "behaviour modification". This technique, its

objectives, its role, if any, within educational contexts and the presuppositions on which it rests, are in need of careful analysis and examination, from among others, the point of view of action theory. Another area of growing concern in education these days has to do with the quality of teachers and their teaching. Until quite recently the tendency has been to evaluate teachers as persons. In other words, judgments about the quality of teaching were typically based on information concerning the teacher's traits of character or personality. It seems pretty clear that underlying this practice there was an assumption to the effect that good persons make good teachers, since part of the job of the teacher is to be a model for the young — a paragon of virtue, as it were. And not surprisingly, vestiges of the notion of teacher as preacher still linger today, in spite of the fact that this kind of information has turned out to be of precious little value to anyone concerned to make decisions with respect to such matters as the selection, training and hiring of teachers, on the strength of it. For this, and a variety of other reasons, attention, especially within the research community, has turned away from the teacher as person and towards the business of trying to devise ways of evaluating teachers "in action".[31] Indeed, much of the

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[31]For a more detailed discussion of some of the traditional approaches to teacher evaluation and of some of the problems involved in certain contemporary approaches to this problem area see W. Rabinowitz and R.M.W. Travers, 'Problems of Defining and Assessing Teacher Effectiveness,' Educational Theory, Vol. 3(1953), pp. 212-19, B. Rosenshine, 'Evaluation of Classroom Instruction,' Review of Educational Research, Vol. 4 (1970), pp. 279-300, J.D. McNeil and W.J. Popham, 'The Assessment of Teacher Competence,' in R.M.W. Travers (ed.), op. cit., pp. 218-44, and D. Berliner, 'A Status Report on the Study of Teacher Effectiveness,' Journal of Research in Science Teaching, Vol. 13 (1976), pp. 369-82.

activity we considered in connection with classroom research has had this as one of its primary aims. In other words, the emphasis is now on the matter of what makes good teaching good, rather than on what makes good teachers good.

Apart from the very complex normative issues involved in this problem area, researchers interested in the study of good teaching must also wrestle with even more fundamental questions including: 'What kinds of actions are to count as teaching acts?', 'What is an action, and how is it to be distinguished from its antecedents, its upshots and various other human events that typically occur in the classroom?', and 'What kinds of descriptions of the things teachers do are likely to be most useful for various kinds of evaluation, e.g., effectiveness, efficiency, the moral qualities of the teaching, and for the further purposes such evaluations may serve, e.g., the selection, pre-service training, hiring, in-service training, and promotion of teachers?'. In short, research into good teaching must confront and attempt to deal not only with all of the questions that were raised in respect of classroom research aimed primarily at understanding teaching, but, in addition, with a host of normative questions deriving from educational theory. Here, once again, it is evident that action theory must figure prominently in our efforts to come to grips with teaching, especially when we are interested in teaching that is good, meritorious, or worthwhile from an educational point of view.

And, finally, and perhaps most importantly, it seems to me absolutely essential that those being trained to embark on a career in teaching or those already at work in the field come, in some way or

other, to understand and appreciate the kinds of problems, conceptual, explanatory, moral, and so on, that are the heart of philosophical inquiry into human action. The reason is just this: that in order to teach children and young people in such a way as to play a beneficial role in their becoming educated persons one *must* have an adequate theory (or conception) of children or young people as persons. And since, as I maintained at the very beginning of this inquiry, the key to understanding human beings as persons, rather than as physical objects, lies in understanding their actions, it is clear that a theory of action is an indispensible requirement of this task. Hence, if as I have claimed, a theory of action is necessary to understanding human beings — in this case children and young people — as persons, in the sense that without it no such understanding is possible, then the only questions that remain have to do with the adequacy of those conceptions or theories. Are we to leave them as stunted and impoverished as many of them seem to be? Or are we to take steps to devise ways of assisting both the initiates and the experienced to examine and evaluate their views of children and young people in order to ensure that they come more adequately to understand them as persons — as individuals that think, act, learn, feel, and so on. To me the answer is clear. And in this connection the kinds of concerns raised in the course of any such undertaking must overlap to a very considerable extent with those that are central to philosophical inquiry into human action.

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